DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 264 EC 304 513

AUTHOR Giesen, J. Martin; And Others
TITLE Participation Levels of African Americans in the Profession of Blindness Services: Views of Service Providers.
INSTITUTION Alabama A and M Univ., Normal.; Mississippi State Univ., Mississippi State. Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Nov 95
CONTRACT H133B10003
NOTE 91p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *Blacks; *Career Choice; *Change Strategies; Counselor Attitudes; Counselors; Decision Making; Employment Opportunities; *Employment Patterns; Social Services; State Surveys; *Visual Impairments; *Vocational Rehabilitation
IDENTIFIERS *African Americans; Alabama; Mississippi

ABSTRACT

This study investigated possible reasons for the observed imbalance in the level of employment of African Americans in vocational rehabilitation (VR) services for persons with visual impairments in Alabama and Mississippi. A survey instrument was developed and administered to 126 administrators, professional service providers, and secretaries employed in Alabama and Mississippi VR agencies for persons with visual impairments. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with all 21 black employees in both states. Possible reasons identified included low salaries, lack of jobs, unawareness of the blindness profession, lack of training and education programs, low accessibility of such programs to black students, and negative views and attitudes toward social service occupations by black students and others. Questionnaire and interview responses converged on the following recommendations: (1) increase awareness by strategic publicity and dissemination of information on careers, training programs in blindness services, and blindness as a disability; (2) increase attractiveness by increasing salaries, benefits, and financial assistance for education/training; (3) increase the number and preparedness of potential employees by developing more and different training programs, especially at historically Black institutions; and (4) enhance recruiting, hiring, and job opportunities by strategic recruiting, advocacy of preparedness, employer flexibility, and a commitment to eliminate discrimination. The survey instrument is appended. (Contains 27 references.) (Author/DB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 391 264

# Participation Levels of African Americans in the Profession of Blindness Services: Views of Service Providers

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
K.S. Schaefer
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Rehabilitation Research & Training Center on Blindness & Low Vision

*a collaborative effort of the:*

**Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision**

**and Alabama A & M University**

EC304513

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# Participation Levels of African Americans in the Profession of Blindness Services: Views of Service Providers

J. Martin Giesen, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Mississippi State University

Earl M. Gooding, Ph.D., Director
Center for Urban and Rural Research
Alabama A&M University

Lynn W. McBroom, Ph.D., Research Scientist II
Mississippi State University

James Hicks, Ed.D., Dean
School of Education
Alabama A&M University

Suzanne Ewing, B.A., Research Assistant I
Mississippi State University

John H. Maxson, M.S.
Associate Director and Training Director
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
on Blindness and Low Vision
Mississippi State University

Gloria K. Armstrong, B.A.
Community Counseling Services
Starkville, MS

November, 1995

Copyright © 1995

This monograph is the result of a research project conducted jointly by Alabama A&M University and the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. Development of this document was supported in part by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision Grant H133B10003 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, Department of Education, Washington, DC. Opinions expressed in this document are not necessarily those of the granting agency.

Mississippi State University
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
on Blindness and Low Vision
P. O. Drawer 6189
Mississippi State, MS 39762

Mississippi State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, veteran status, or disability.

### *Brief Abstract*

This study investigated the level of participation by African Americans in vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to persons who are visually impaired. It has been documented that African Americans are substantially under-represented in the service provider ranks, yet African Americans and other minorities are often over-represented as clients of services. This study used surveys and interviews with all state VR personnel serving persons with visual impairments in Alabama and Mississippi to investigate why this imbalanced situation exists. The study was a joint project between the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University and Alabama A&M University. Findings indicated that the imbalanced representation exists in Alabama and Mississippi and that there are areas of similarity and areas of differences between Black and White professionals in their views of the blindness rehabilitation profession. Recommendations for recruiting practices of state VR agencies were made along with recommendations for a greater emphasis on career awareness and availability of degree programs for minorities in blindness VR.



### *Abstract*

An imbalance exists in the rehabilitation system for African Americans. African Americans are under-represented among rehabilitation professionals who provide services to persons with visual impairments and often over-represented as consumers and clients of blindness rehabilitation services. This study investigated what service delivery professionals believe are the factors that account for the low levels of participation of African Americans in the profession of service delivery to persons who are blind. Some of the possible reasons may include low salaries; lack of jobs; unawareness of the blindness profession, particularly among students, teachers, and counselors; lack of training and education programs; low accessibility of such programs to Black students; and negative views and attitudes toward social service occupations by Black students and others. These possibilities were investigated in the present study.

Rehabilitation service delivery professionals were surveyed to determine the factors and barriers which resulted in low levels of participation by African Americans in services to persons who are blind. A survey instrument was developed which contained a set of core questions for service providers and an additional set of questions appropriate for administrators and support staff. These questionnaires were administered by mail with follow-ups to 126 administrators, professional service providers, and secretaries employed in Alabama and Mississippi VR agencies for persons with visual impairments. The instrument contained 43 rating questions plus "demographic" questions. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with all 21 Black employees in both states.

Data analysis was descriptive and comparative of differences between Black and White respondents and between administrators, service delivery personnel, and secretaries. Survey results were integrated with interview results for this report. Analyses indicated five themes: (a) endorsement of efforts to increase participation of Blacks, (b) differences in attractiveness of the blindness services profession, (c) factors affecting Black participation in the profession of blindness services, (d) future prospects for Black participants in the profession of blindness services, and (e) differences in perceptions of advantages and participation in blindness services as part of society.

Because of the wording of many of the rating questions, the results from the survey were often couched in terms of different levels of agreement or disagreement between Black and White respondents. For items that dealt with awareness, attractiveness, and participation, there was considerable agreement about what would increase Black participation in blindness services. These issues can be summarized under *increase information, dissemination, and publicity; and develop more training programs, particularly at Historically Black Institutions (HBIs)*. These conclusions from survey ratings are highly consistent with write-in responses on the survey and with interview results.

Ratings indicated that there were substantial Black/White differences in the perceptions of attractiveness of working in blindness services. In general, the view was that Whites have advantages in hearing about, seeking, being prepared for, getting, holding, and advancing in blindness services jobs. These results were also generally consistent with write-in and interview responses. In general, Whites were more optimistic than Blacks.

Ratings also indicated that there were differences in perceptions about the impact of job stability and lack of new jobs on the low level of career participation by Blacks, and the impact of increased financial assistance for training on Black participation.

There were also differences in perceptions regarding Blacks getting their fair share of new jobs and the impact of "government policies" on participation by Blacks. And lastly, it was the view that Blacks have been at a disadvantage "across the board" in employment in blindness services, including past discrimination; less awareness; and less opportunity for training, employment, and advancement.

Regarding population and service data, African Americans were modestly over-represented as clients of VR serving persons who are blind in Alabama and Mississippi; this was consistent with national data (Kirchner & Peterson, 1981). African Americans are under-represented in professional (administrative, service provider) ranks in VR agencies serving persons who are blind in Alabama and Mississippi. It is not known if this under-representation reflects a national trend, or whether it is specific to the field of blindness rehabilitation.

The ratings, write-in, and interview responses converged on several conclusions and recommendations for increasing career participation in blindness services by African Americans. These included: (a) Increase awareness by

strategic publicity and dissemination of information on careers, training programs in blindness services, and information on blindness as a disability; (b) increase attractiveness by increasing salaries, benefits, and financial assistance for education/training; (c) increase the number and preparedness of potential employees by developing more and different training programs, particularly at HBIs, and with increased financial assistance to students; and (d) enhance recruiting, hiring, and job opportunities by strategic recruiting, advocacy of preparedness, employer flexibility, and the commitment to eliminate discrimination.

## Table of Contents


INTRODUCTION . . . . . 1
Literature Review . . . . . 1
Prevalence of Blindness Among African Americans . . . . . 1
Representation of Women and Minorities as Service Providers . . . 2
Minorities in the Population and in the Blindness VR Service System . . . . . 3
Minorities and Job/Career Preparation Patterns . . . . . 6
Geography, Economics, and Health Factors in Visual Impairment . . . . . 6
Research Questions . . . . . 7

METHOD . . . . . 9
Overview . . . . . 9
Subjects . . . . . 9
Procedures . . . . . 9
Instruments . . . . . 10
The Project Advisory Council . . . . . 10
Specific Procedure . . . . . 11

RESULTS . . . . . 13
Agency Data on Service and Employment . . . . . 13
Results from Survey Instrument . . . . . 15
Survey Results: Administrator and Support Staff Questions . . . . 15
Summary of Administrators' Ratings . . . . . 18
Survey Results: Core Questions . . . . . 19
Theme 1: Endorsement of Efforts to Increase Participation of Blacks . . . . . 20
Theme 2: Differences in Attractiveness of the Blindness Services Profession . . . . . 23
Theme 3: Factors Affecting Black Participation in the Profession of Blindness Services . . . . . 27
Theme 4: Future Prospects for Black Participation in the Profession of Blindness Services . . . . . 30
Theme 5: Differences in Perceptions of Advantages and Participation in Blindness Services as Part of Society . . . . . 33
Biographic and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents . . . . . 38
Open-Ended Questions Included in the Survey: Summary of Write-in Answers . . . . . 42
Open-Ended Questions for Administrators Only . . . . . 42
Open-Ended Questions for All Respondents . . . . . 43
Interviews of Black Professionals in Services to Individuals Who are Blind . . . . . 49

Initial Interview . . . . . 49
Follow-Up Interviews of Black Professionals . . . . . 52
Summary Conclusions and Recommendations . . . . . 53
From Agency Data . . . . . 53
From Administrators' Ratings . . . . . 53
From Survey Ratings . . . . . 55
From Survey Open-Ended Questions . . . . . 55
Attracting Black Professionals: Current Efforts . . . . . 56
Making Careers in Blindness Services More Visible and Attractive . . . . . 56
Increasing Participation of African Americans in Training Programs . . . . . 56
Recruiting, Hiring Practices, Real Job Opportunities . . . . . 56
Summary of Perceptions From Interviews of Black Professionals . . . . . 57
Final Conclusions . . . . . 58
Implications . . . . . 58
What's Underway . . . . . 58
The Future . . . . . 59

REFERENCES . . . . . 61

APPENDICES . . . . . 65
Appendix A: Agency Data Form . . . . . 67
Appendix B: Summary Instrument . . . . . 71

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Percentages and Means for Administrators and Secretaries Answering Questions A-K . . . . . 16
Table 2 Theme 1: Endorsement of Efforts to Increase Participation of Blacks . . . . . 20
Table 3 Theme 2: Differences in Attractiveness of the Blindness Services Profession . . . . . 23
Table 4 Theme 3: Factors Affecting Black Participation in the Profession of Blindness Services . . . . . 27
Table 5 Theme 4: Future Prospects for Black Participation in the Profession of Blindness Services . . . . . 30
Table 6 Theme 5: Differences in Perceptions of Advantages and Participation in Blindness Services as Part of Society . . . . . 33
Table 7 Respondents' Highest Level of Education . . . . . 39
Table 8 Highest Level of Education by Gender . . . . . 39
Table 9 Highest Level of Education by Race . . . . . 40
Table 10 Highest Level of Education for Either Parent and Spouse . . . . 41

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Proportion of African Americans: US Population and Blindness VR . . . . . 4
Figure 2 African Americans in US and State Populations . . . . . 4
Figure 3 African Americans as Clients of State VR Blind Services in Alabama and Mississippi . . . . . 14
Figure 4 African Americans as Employees in State VR Blind Services In Alabama and Mississippi . . . . . 14
Figure 5 Endorsement of Efforts to Increase Participation of Blacks . . . 22
Figure 6 Differences in Attractiveness of Blindness Services Profession . . . . . 26
Figure 7 Factors Affecting Black Participation in Blindness Services . . 29
Figure 8 Future Prospects for Black Participation in Blindness Services 32
Figure 9 Differences in Perceptions of Blindness Services as a Societal Outlook . . . . . 37
Figure 10 African Americans in State, as Clients, and as Providers: Alabama and Mississippi . . . . . 54

## INTRODUCTION

African Americans and other members of minority groups appear to be substantially under-represented in the professional and occupational ranks of rehabilitation service providers for persons who are blind or visually impaired. Since African Americans are proportionally represented or over-represented as clients and consumers of rehabilitation services for persons with blindness, this situation is particularly incongruous. In addition, African Americans suffer a greater incidence of disability and other conditions which can lead to blindness and visual impairments, in part attributable to the level of health care access (Kirchner, 1985; Walker, Akpati, Roberts, Palmer, & Newson, 1986). This situation may be exacerbated by the expected preference of minority consumers to interact with and to receive services from providers of similar minority status. It might be expected that this imbalanced situation would be pronounced in the Southeastern United States because of the generally higher percentage of African Americans in the region.

The central questions addressed by this research are why this imbalanced situation exists, and what factors or barriers have led to the low level of participation of African Americans in the profession of service delivery to persons who are blind or visually impaired? The barriers may be attitudinal, informational, social, political, economic, geographic, environmental, or interactions of any of these factors. The cause or reasons could be low salaries; lack of available jobs in the field; lack of awareness of the profession of rehabilitation service delivery by African American students, teachers, and counselors in secondary and postsecondary institutions; lack of rehabilitation service delivery training programs for African Americans and other minority students; and possible pronounced negative attitudes toward social service occupations by African American students.

It is assumed that increased membership by African Americans and other minorities in the profession of services to persons who are blind is desirable, appropriate for the field, and would improve service delivery. It is further assumed that once the reasons for low participation of African Americans are identified, directions for programs and activities could be established to improve the existing imbalanced situation.

### *Literature Review*

#### *Prevalence of Blindness Among African Americans*

It is estimated that African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans make up 17% of the U.S. population, with African Americans comprising 13% (and 12% African American, when Hispanics are excluded) (U.S.

Bureau of the Census, 1995). At first glance, these numbers may appear small. However, researchers have shown that the prevalence of visual impairments among these groups is much higher than among the White majority (Kirchner, 1985; Kirchner & Peterson, 1981). One estimate indicates there are approximately 3 million persons who are visually impaired (Tielsch, Sommer, Witt, Katz, & Royall, 1990). Of these, ethnic minorities account for one third of the visually impaired population (National Center for Health Statistics, 1977). African Americans report blindness or visual impairments 3 times more often than Whites (Kirchner, 1985; National Center for Health Statistics, 1977; Walker et al., 1986). Other studies also support very similar prevalence figures for these minority groups (Kahn & Moorehead, 1973; National Center for Health Statistics, 1977; National Center for Health Statistics and National Center for Health Service Research, 1977).

Kirchner (1985) found differences in rates of visual impairments between non-Whites and Whites that are greatest in the working age populations (ages 16-64). Examining only members of the labor force, 41% of Blacks with disabilities earn below poverty incomes (Bowe, 1992). Blacks in the labor force have less disposable income, are less likely to be covered by health care plans, and tend to avoid costly medical care. As a result, they are less likely to seek medical care for treatable conditions.

According to the United Way of America (1987), visual impairments among minorities have increased during the 1980s and are predicted to increase further into the 1990s. This finding is also supported by Asbury, Walker, Maholmes, Rackley, and White (1991); and Bowe (1985).

***Representation of Women and Minorities as Service Providers***

Findings from studies of representation levels of women and minorities may suggest a pattern for African Americans. Tedder and Maxson (1990) found that women are inadequately represented as minority service providers in the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program (BEP). As age and specialization increased, the proportional participation of women tended to decrease. The pattern of level of participation for women in the service provider workforce may provide a parallel for the level of participation of African Americans.

Hill and Jacobson (1986) reported that men outnumbered women as specialist professionals for many years, indicating that women are under-represented as "specialists". Since 1983, the overall percentage of women entering the service provider workforce has increased, indicating there may be a change in the trend. Characteristics of service providers in 1983 show that women outnumbered men 3 to 1 in the under-30 age group, women outnumbered men by less than 5% in the 31-40 age group, and men outnumbered women in the over-40 age group; this indicates that age is also a factor in the balance of participation. Of the respondents who entered the workforce after 1985, 81% were women and

19% were men. However, among this group, 94% of the female respondents identified themselves as White (Uslan, Hill, & Peck, 1989). From these patterns, it might be speculated that African Americans are under-represented in the workforce as service providers to persons who are blind and visually impaired.

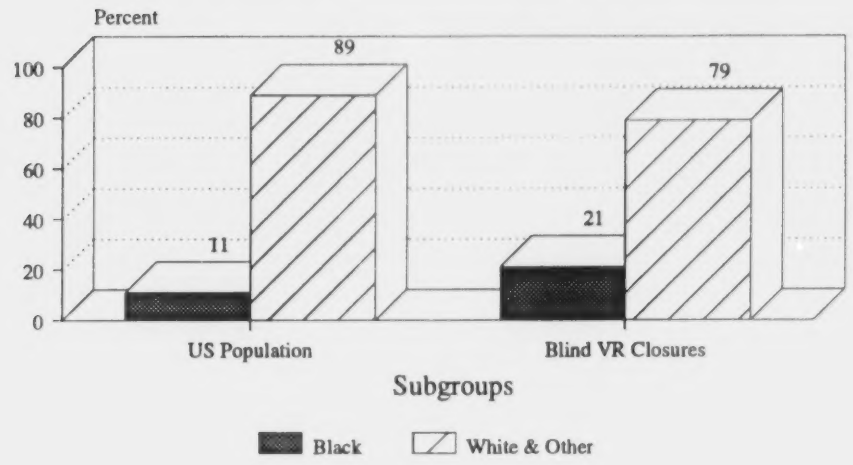
***Minorities in the Population and in the Blindness VR Service System***

According to prevalence and VR statistics, people who need blindness services come disproportionately from minority groups. Based on Kirchner and Peterson's (1981) report of 1971-72 data sample, the ethnic breakdown of the U.S. population was 83% White (not Hispanic), 11% Black (not Hispanic), 5% Hispanic, and 1% "Other". In terms of those who applied for blindness VR services during the same time period, 69% were White, 21% were Black, 9% were Hispanic, and 4% were Other. Thus, as might be expected based on prevalence studies (Blacks were 3 times as likely as Whites to report having a visual impairment), Blacks represented a higher percentage of blindness VR clients (21%) than their proportion in the general population (11%). For additional comparisons, see Figure 1. For Whites, the comparison is 83% in the general population and 66% in blindness VR. Among applicants for blindness VR services, 30% of Whites were legally blind, while 25% of African Americans were legally blind; this suggests that Blacks may have more visual problems, but not necessarily more severe visual impairments. The main conclusion from these data and comparisons is that African Americans are indeed proportionately over-represented as clients of blindness VR.

For additional comparisons, data from the 1990 census indicated that African Americans comprised 12%, and White plus "Other" subgroups comprised 88% of the U.S. population. In Alabama and Mississippi combined, 29% were African American and 71% were White and Other (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992a, 1992b). For Americans age 40 and older, 9% were African American and 91% were White and Other. For the same age group in Alabama and Mississippi, 23% were African American and 77% were White and Other (Prevent Blindness America, 1994) (Figure 2).

In terms of percentages of persons who are legally blind or visually impaired over age 40 in the U.S., the average national rate was 3%. The rate was 5% for Blacks and 3% for White and Other. For Mississippi and Alabama combined, blind and visually impaired over age 40, the average rate was 4% with 6% for Blacks and 3% for White and Other (Prevent Blindness America, 1994). These data indicated that (a) there is a substantially higher proportion of African Americans in Mississippi and Alabama than the national average proportion; (b) the same trend is true for Americans age 40 and older, although the proportions for Blacks are somewhat reduced; (c) the percentage of persons age 40 and over who are blind or visually impaired is greater for Blacks than for Whites and Others; and (d) the rate of blindness and visual impairment is higher in

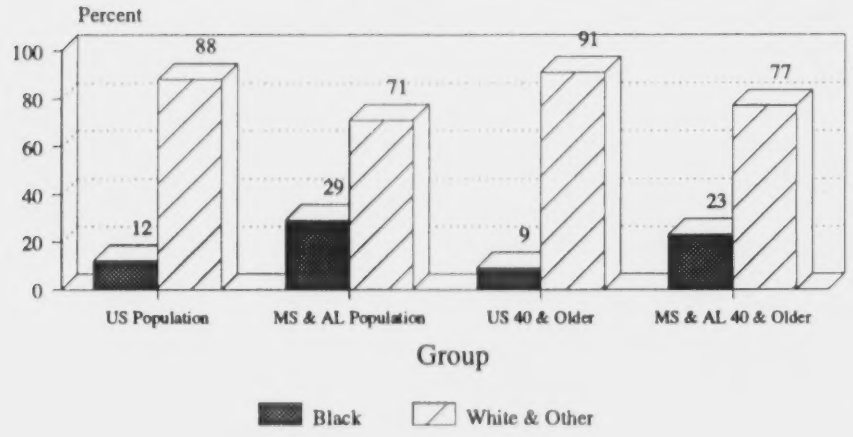
# Proportion of African Americans: US Population & Blindness VR




Kirchner and Peterson (1981)
1971-72 data

Figure 1

# African Americans in US and State Populations




Based on 1990 census and
Prevent Blindness America data.
MS=Missisippi; AL=Alabama

Figure 2

Mississippi and Alabama for Blacks than the national rate, while this is not true for Whites and Others combined.

Returning to Kirchner and Peterson's (1981) report, there were other differences between applicants based on ethnic identity. White applicants tended to have higher levels of education than non-White applicants. Forty-one percent of the White applicants completed 12 or more years of education compared to 28% of the African American applicants and 19% of the Hispanic applicants. At the time of referral and/or application, 24% of the African Americans were on public assistance compared to 17% of the Hispanics and 16% of the Whites.

Questions have been advanced about the rehabilitation system perpetuating the inequalities among the client subgroups who receive services. Based on national data from the VR system for persons with general disabilities, Kirchner and Peterson (1981) concluded that (a) those in need of VR services are proportionately more likely to come from ethnic minority groups, (b) minority clients require a different combination of services, and (c) minority clients are harder to place in competitive employment than are majority clients.

Based on summary outcome data, including rates of acceptance, successful closures, paid closures, and employment in the year after closure, Kirchner and Peterson (1981) tentatively concluded that the VR system works in the direction of reducing inequalities among client subgroups, but with restricted long-term success. Other investigators disagreed.

Atkins and Wright (1980) contended that Blacks are less likely to be accepted for VR services than Whites. Three most common reasons given by counselors for nonacceptance of Blacks with disabilities were failure to cooperate, lack of vocational handicap, and lack of disabling condition (Atkins, 1993; Danek & Lawrence, 1982). When Blacks were eligible for services, they were less likely to be rehabilitated, they were less likely to receive college training, and were more likely to receive less costly VR services. Danek and Lawrence (1982) reported that White clients were accepted in a shorter time period than Black clients. Black clients tended to be supported by public and private assistance at referral and White clients, by family or friends. Black and White clients were about the same age, yet White clients had obtained more years of education. At case closure, more Whites were employed in professional, technical, managerial, clerical, and sales positions, and more Blacks were employed in service industries and as homemakers. Black counselors served proportionately more Black clients than White counselors.

In a survey of consumers of blindness services, respondents indicated that a close personal relationship between a service provider and client was extremely important (Uslan et al., 1989). This suggests that an effort to recruit specialists from racial and ethnic minorities is necessary to provide more effective programs that address cultural diversities, including language differences. Although general attempts have been made to reach specific minority groups and to improve the services offered to those groups (Ruiz, 1983), significant improvements have not occurred. Minority groups still appear not to be receiving services according to

their needs, as evidenced in part by their continued high incidence of visual impairments.

### *Minorities and Job/Career Preparation Patterns*

Except for vocational school training programs, Whites received various types of training more often than African Americans or Hispanics. All groups received the same amount of vocational school training. Occupational status after completion of any type training, reflected the general overall labor force as indicated by educational levels and ethnic composition. For example, African Americans (37%) were more likely to be employed in service jobs than were Hispanics (28%) or Whites (21%). Hispanics (19%) were more often in agricultural jobs compared to African Americans (6%) or Whites (4%). Whites (23%) were more often found in professional, technical, or managerial jobs than African Americans (13%) or Hispanics (8%). The length of time that clients remained on rehabilitation rolls also varied across ethnic groups, with 27% of Whites on the roll for 2 or more years compared to 22% of African Americans and 20% of Hispanics (Kirchner & Peterson, 1981).

### *Geography, Economics, and Health Factors in Visual Impairment*

Population distribution of persons with visual impairments can be geographically located in specific areas. The majority of African Americans with visual impairments (53%) reside in the South compared to 33% of the Whites with visual impairments. A further breakdown shows the specific place of residence for Blacks with visual impairments to be highest in central cities and nonfarm communities (80%) and lowest in metropolitan suburbs and farm communities. Overall, 78% of the disabled African American population live in cities; 48% fall below the official poverty line (Asbury et al., 1991; Bowe, 1985; Kirchner, 1985).

Poverty may be an important consideration in the etiology of visual impairment among African Americans. Thornhill and HoSong (1988) speculated that visual impairments and other physical impairments are often perpetuated as well as aggravated by poverty. Another contributing cause for increased prevalence of visual impairments among working-age African Americans could be employment in occupations which are more likely to be physically demanding.

It has been noted that evidence indicates the incidence and prevalence of blindness is higher among Blacks than among Whites. This higher rate may be due to socioeconomic factors which affect the availability of health care for African Americans, particularly during prenatal development and early childhood. Severe disabilities may emerge from the lack of early intervention and treatment of less severe medical conditions. There are also particular visual disorders and genetic predispositions associated with visual disorders (e.g., sickle-cell anemia, hypertension, diabetes) that are found to occur at higher rates among Black Americans than among White Americans (Bowe, 1992).

Therefore, an increase in the number of service providers with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds could result in greater outreach into minority communities. Such efforts may reach more people who are not currently being served by the rehabilitation system. These service providers might also have an impact on some of the root causes of the high incidence of blindness and visual impairments among minority populations.

### *Research Questions*

From the above review and in order to investigate the perceptions and factors affecting participation by African Americans, the following research questions were proposed:

1. What are the barriers to participation by African Americans in the blindness profession with respect to professionals and state agency administrators in services to persons who are blind?

2. How can these barriers be identified, described, and classified and how can perspectives be compared?

3. What differences in perceptions exist between race and position in the service delivery organizations?

4. What recommendations can be made to help change or ameliorate such barriers, and increase participation by African Americans in the profession of services to persons who are blind?

## METHOD

### *Overview*

Two groups were surveyed to determine the factors and barriers affecting the level of participation by African Americans in the profession of services to persons who are blind. Information was gathered from rehabilitation service delivery professionals and administrators in state agencies serving persons who are blind in Mississippi and Alabama. These two states were selected *not* because the phenomenon of low level of participation was expected to be severe, but because of several factors. These states were selected because they have high rates of incidence of blindness (Mississippi has the highest rate in the nation), they have a relatively high percentage of African Americans, and they are often viewed as "representative" of the Deep South. Further, the choice was made in part due to fiscal constraints; the location of the RRTC and of Alabama A&M University; and the rapport between the organizations, universities, and state VR agencies.

A survey instrument was developed which contained a set of core questions and additional questions appropriate for each personnel group. In addition, open-ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with all Black VR employees in both states. All surveys contained quantitative and qualitative questions designed to elicit information about the factors and barriers responsible for the low participation by African Americans in the profession of services to persons who are blind.

### *Subjects*

Subjects were all administrators, professional service providers, and secretaries in state VR agencies serving persons with visual impairments in Alabama and Mississippi.

### *Procedures*

The general methodological approach was drawn from social action research (Lewin, 1951); experimental social innovation (Fairweather, 1977); and participatory action research (White, 1991). The full design of these methods allows researchers to (a) determine present conditions and problems, (b) analyze those problems, (c) develop solutions, (d) consider the psychosocial and cultural context of those problems and solutions, (e) implement solutions, (f) evaluate effectiveness of solutions, and (g) involve members of target or recipient groups in all phases of activities. The present project was limited in scope relative to the

full social action research cycle. This project and report focuses on the first and second general steps of problem identification and problem analysis. Developing recommendations for solutions to problems is also addressed in this report, but major attention to implementation of solutions is reserved for future research and constituency follow-through.

### *Instruments*

***Agency data form***. This was a one page form requesting frequency counts on total number of clients served who were blind or visually impaired in the last 3 available fiscal years. The form also requested a breakdown of the numbers of clients served by race. The number of staff position vacancies by year for the last 3 fiscal years was also requested (Appendix A).

***Survey instrument***. The survey instrument contained several questions specifically for agency administrators, a core set of 43 attitude-related rating questions employing a one to six point Likert-type scale, several open-ended questions for written comments, and a section requesting demographic information on the respondent (Appendix B).

***Structured interview questions***. These questions were related to the themes and issues raised in the survey instrument and were constructed to guide the respondent through the issues of focus while permitting freedom of response. These questions were used in the context of a structured interview (in person or by telephone) conducted by the co-researchers at Alabama A&M University, both of whom were experienced interviewers.

### *The Project Advisory Council*

As delineated in the original research proposal, this research employed a council of consumers and constituents who served as part of the research team. The Council provided recommendations and suggestions for all phases of project activity to ensure that the Consumer Oriented Research and Dissemination (CORD) philosophy permeated all project activities. This was accomplished by an Advisory Council Meeting held early in the project period where the research aims, instruments, procedures, etc. were reviewed and modified by the collaborative efforts of the Council and the research staffs at A&M and MSU. Since this study was a part of a longer research program, the yearly Advisory Council Meetings provided sequential opportunities to infuse Council input and recommendations for interpretations, conclusions, recommendations, and dissemination of the project of the preceding year, as well as input at the beginning of future year projects.

The principal investigators and research staff on the project wish to express our sincere thanks to members of the Council for their valuable and thoughtful contributions. Council members were as follows:

Ms. Judyette Dean, Elementary Educator, Huntsville, Alabama. Ms. Dean is African American and visually impaired.

Mr. Carter Gable, Volunteer Service Officer, Mississippi Blinded Veterans Association, Jackson, Mississippi. Mr. Gable is visually impaired.

Mr. Byrom Goodwin, Private Rehabilitation Consultant, Huntsville, Alabama. Mr. Goodwin is Native American.

Dr. Everet M. ("Butch") Hill, Professor of Special Education, Peabody College of Vanderbilt University.

Mr. Robert Kelly, Facility Manager in the Business Enterprise Program, Huntsville, Alabama. Mr. Kelly is African American and visually impaired.

Ms. Betty Thompson, VR counselor and former Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation of the Blind, Jackson, Mississippi. Ms. Thompson is African American.

***Specific Procedure***

Permission was obtained from agency directors to interview their employees. Lists of names and addresses were provided by the state agencies. The main survey instrument was developed, revised, pretested, and finalized. The instrument had 43 rating questions plus "demographic" questions. Mail surveys with follow-ups were conducted in both states. Open-ended interviews were conducted with all Black employees in both states by co-investigators at Alabama A&M University.

## RESULTS

There were several sources of data and information that provided results. These included (a) a brief data form completed by agency administrators on the number and race of clients served, (b) the survey instrument itself (of which there were three versions), and (c) responses from open-ended interviews.

### *Agency Data on Service and Employment*

In order to obtain actual frequency counts of the number of people served who are blind or visually impaired, the number of minority individuals served who were visually impaired, and staff vacancies in state agencies during the past 3 fiscal years, a special data questionnaire was developed (Appendix A). This data form was completed by the agency contact person in each state.

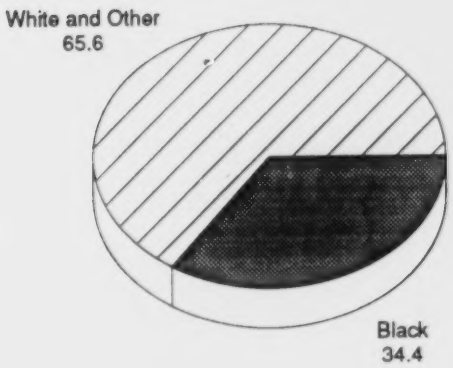
Results of this records-based dataset indicated that, on the average, 1,948 persons per state who were visually impaired were served annually in both Alabama and Mississippi. Of this group, 34% were African American; the remainder were White or members of another minority classification. It should be noted that the Other minority classification amounted to less than one half of 1%.

The average number of vacancies per year for the two states was 3.0 positions. These staff vacancies could have occurred in either administrative or professional service delivery ranks.

The breakdowns for clients and employees by race, and employees by race and position type are shown in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 indicates that clients of VR agencies serving persons who are blind were approximately 66% White and 34% Black. At the time of data collection, there were a total of 116 administrative and professional service delivery employees in state VR agencies serving clients who are blind in Alabama and Mississippi. This total did not include support staff which were included in the attitudinal survey. There were 15 White and 2 Black administrators, and 86 White and 13 Black service delivery professionals. Among administrators, 12% were African American. Among service delivery professionals, 13% were African American. The combined staff total averaged 13% African American.

With respect to the issue of comparative representation of Blacks as clients versus as professional employees, there is a greater proportion of African Americans who are clients than who are employees in blindness services. *Approximately 1 in 3 clients is African American, while about 1 in 8 employees is African American. Thus, the proportion of African American clients is about 2 1/2 times greater than the proportion of African Americans who are blindness services employees.* This data clearly indicates that Blacks are under-represented as service providers compared to their representation as service recipients.

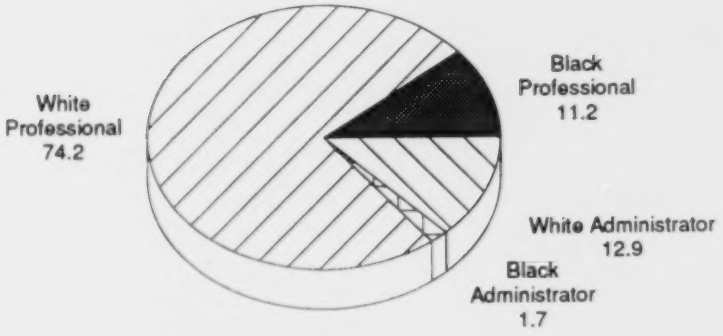
# African Americans as Clients of State VR Blind Services in Alabama and Mississippi




Other minorities comprised less than 1/2 of 1 percent

Figure 3

# African Americans as Employees in State VR Blind Services in Alabama and Mississippi




Professionals provide direct services. (N=116)

Figure 4

### *Results from Survey Instrument*

There were three versions of the survey instrument: one for administrators, one for professional service delivery personnel, and one for secretaries. Each version had a set of common core questions, write-in questions, and demographic questions at the end of the instrument. The survey instruments differed only with respect to inclusion of position-specific questions at the beginning of the instrument. The position-specific questions were lettered alphabetically to distinguish them from the core questions, which were numbered sequentially.

Results from the survey instrument are presented in four sections. First, questions for administrators and secretaries are discussed. Next, questions answered by respondents in all positions (administrators, professionals, and secretaries) are given. The next section contains demographic characteristics of the respondents. Finally, a summary of the open-ended write-in questions in the survey instrument is given. A copy of the complete survey instrument (administrator version, which is comprehensive) is provided in Appendix B.

Survey results from 126 respondents, including administrators, service delivery professionals, and secretaries (86% response rate) were received, coded, and analyzed. Data analysis was descriptive and comparative of differences between Black and White respondents and between administrators, service delivery personnel, and secretaries. *T*-tests were employed to examine differences between Black and White respondents; analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine differences between the three employment positions. In general, results indicated minimal attitudinal differences between personnel categories and many differences for race of respondent. ***It should be noted*** that the sample sizes vary on particular questions due to missing data (nonresponse on some items) and on some of the demographic breakdowns due to respondents' self-classification of position.

### *Survey Results: Administrator and Support Staff Questions*

The version of the survey sent to administrators included 11 additional questions which were specifically designed for agency administrators. Questions G and I of these were included in the version of the survey sent to secretaries to permit comparison of their responses to those of administrators and to tap the conventional wisdom that "secretaries know what's *really* going on". Table 1 provides a list of the questions for administrators and secretaries. Means are given for items rated on a six point Likert-type scale and for other items where appropriate. Percents are indicated for items requiring a "yes" or "no" response. Data are displayed separately by race and by position. Shading indicates statistically significant differences at the .05 level.

Question A (specific efforts to attract Black professionals) was answered "yes" by 58% of the White and none of the Black administrators. This striking difference did not attain statistical significance, but the test had low power in this

context of small sample size and extremely unequal group sizes. The responses on this item are consistent with Theme 3 (to be defined and discussed later), which, in essence, reflects the view that White respondents believe that "minority inclusion" efforts were being made and were adequate, while Black respondents did not believe this.

**Table 1. Percentages and Means for Administrators and Secretaries Answering Questions A-K**

| | | Race | | Position | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White N=12 | Black N=2 | Adm. N=18 | Sec. N=31 |
| A. | Have specific efforts been made to attract Black professionals into your organization? (Y/N) | 58% | 0% | 53% | |
| B. | Are there barriers in the personnel system procedures of your organization that may inhibit targeted recruiting of Blacks? (Y/N) | 15% | 0% | 13% | |
| C. | Are there changes which can be made in your personnel system procedures, which, in your opinion, would enhance the recruitment of Blacks? (Y/N) | **21%** | **100%** | 25% | |
| D. | What is the **approximate age range** of the professional employees in your organization? | 28.23 | 26.00 | 28.69 | |
| E. | What is the **approximate average age** of the professional employees in your organization? | 40.21 | 40.00 | 39.88 | |
| F. | We are unable to attract qualified Black professional employees due to our entry level pay scale. | 2.86 | 3.50 | 2.88 | |

(cont.)

| Item | Question | Race | | Position | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | White N=12 | Black N=2 | Adm. N=18 | Sec. N=31 |
| G. | Policy makers in this organization have an active plan to encourage recruitment of qualified Black employees. | **4.03** | **2.00** | 3.94 | 3.38 |
| H. | The lack of Black administrators inhibits efforts at recruiting qualified Black employees. | **2.21** | **5.00** | 2.65 | |
| I. | The personnel system procedures of this organization present barriers to targeted recruiting of Blacks. | **1.58** | **2.89** | 1.88 | 1.92 |
| J. | More Black professional employees will enhance the quality of service delivery. | 3.46 | 4.50 | 3.56 | |
| K. | More Black professional employees will enhance the quality of service delivery to Black clients. | **3.14** | **5.00** | 3.47 | |

*Note: Shading indicates significant differences, $p < .05$, one-tailed test. Items F through K used a six point Likert-type scale.*

With respect to Question B, (barriers in the personnel system that may inhibit targeted recruiting of Blacks), there was agreement (no significant differences between Black and White administrators) that no barriers exist to targeted recruiting of Blacks.

Question C referred to changes in the personnel system that could enhance recruitment of Blacks. All the Black administrators (100%) and only 21% of the White administrators said "yes" to this question; the difference was statistically significant.

Questions D and E requested employees' age range and average age. There were no differences on either of these items with respect to race. The overall age range was approximately 28 years and the average age was about 40 years.

Respondents indicated their disagreement/agreement on a six point Likert scale for Items F through K. There were no differences in agreement between Black and White administrators on Item F (unable to attract qualified Black employees due to entry level pay) and on Item J (more Black professionals will

enhance the quality of service delivery, in general).

There were significant differences between Black and White administrators on Items G, H, I, and K. Considering a scale average of 3.5 as a "dividing line" between agreement and disagreement, White administrators agreed, while Black administrators disagreed that "policy makers have an active plan to encourage recruitment of qualified Black employees" (Item G). Black administrators agreed, while White administrators disagreed that "lack of Black administrators inhibits efforts at recruiting qualified Black employees" (Item H). Both Black and White administrators disagreed that the personnel system procedures presented barriers to targeted recruiting of Blacks (Item I), although there was less disagreement by the Black administrators. Thus, the response on this item is considered to be consistent with that of Item B. Black administrators agreed more strongly, while White administrators disagreed slightly that more Black professionals would enhance service delivery quality to Black clients (Item K).

***Summary of Administrators' Ratings***

Excluding items D and E on age range and average age, already reported above, there are several areas represented in the administrator questions including recruitment issues, barriers in the personnel system, and service delivery. Each of these are considered along with their relevant items.

***Recruitment efforts***. Black administrators tended to disagree that specific efforts had been made (Item A) or that an active plan existed for recruiting Black professionals into the organization (Item G). In contrast, White administrators agreed on these items. This difference in perception suggests a more general theme: White administrators perceive the status quo as more positive, fair, and progressive than do Black administrators.

***Recruitment incentives***. There was agreement between Black and White administrators that entry pay level was *not* a factor in attracting qualified Black employees (Item F). However, data from survey comments and interviews indicated that entry pay level *is* a factor in recruiting qualified employees, regardless of race.

***Recruitment barriers***. Black administrators agreed that lack of Black administrators was detrimental to recruiting qualified Black employees; White administrators disagreed (Item H). This suggests that as more Blacks enter the field and advance, recruiting Black employees should become less difficult.

***The personnel system***. Both Black and White administrators agreed that the personnel system procedures in the two state agencies did not pose barriers to targeted recruitment of Black employees (Items B and I). However, Black administrators felt strongly that there were changes that could be made in the system that would enhance recruitment of Blacks; White administrators mostly disagreed (Item C).

***Service delivery***. Black and White administrators did not believe that more Black professionals would enhance the quality of service delivery in general

(Item J). However, Black administrators did feel that more Black professional employees would enhance the quality of services to Black clients, while White administrators were more uncertain (Item K).

Thus, the following suggestions may be made:

1. With respect to recruiting, more specific efforts and an active plan may increase the level of participation of Blacks in blindness services.
2. While better entry pay levels may increase the attractiveness of employment in the field, it would not be expected to increase participation more for Black than for White employees.
3. Administrators do not view the current personnel system as a problem or barrier, but there is indication that changes could be made to enhance recruitment of Black professionals.
4. There is an expectation that more Black professionals will enhance the quality of service delivery to Black clients.

***Survey Results: Core Questions***

These questions were included in all versions of the survey instrument and were answered by persons in all employment position groups. An informal factor analysis was used to arrange the 43 questions into five general themes. The factor analysis used principal axis factoring and an OBLIMIN oblique rotation in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 4.0 (1990). This procedure helped group questions with similar responses that related to the same factor or theme.

The factor analysis interpretation indicated that this set of survey items measured five factors or themes: (a) *Endorsement of efforts to increase participation of Blacks*; (b) *Differences in attractiveness of the blindness services profession*; (c) *Factors affecting Black participation in the profession of blindness services*; (d) *Future prospects for Black participation in the profession of blindness services*; and (e) *Differences in perceptions of advantages and participation in blindness services as part of society*.

Each theme is discussed in terms of level of ratings and differences which occur by race or position. Each section includes a table with the question, mean rating, and significant differences. Figures are also included in each section to provide graphic displays of means for selected items which characterize each theme.

### *Theme 1: Endorsement of Efforts to Increase Participation of Blacks*

Items related to this theme showed a consistent and high level of agreement between Black and White respondents (Table 2). Both Black and White respondents strongly agreed that the following factors would increase awareness of career opportunities: provide more information at high school and college career days (Q16), develop more publicity (Q17), target Blacks for recruitment efforts (Q32), and develop degree and training programs at historically Black colleges and universities (Q25). Respondents also agreed that blindness services will become more attractive to Blacks as more Blacks work in the field (Q6).

It was mutually disagreed by Black and White respondents that there are more college training opportunities for Blacks than for Whites (Q19) (Figure 5).

**Table 2. Theme 1: Endorsement of Efforts to Increase Participation of Blacks**

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 16. | **More information** on professions in blindness services at high school and college career days will greatly increase awareness of careers in blindness. | 5.52 | 5.83 | 5.28 | 5.48 | 5.63 |
| 17. | **More publicity** about blindness and/or blindness professionals will increase awareness of career opportunities. | 5.51 | 5.83 | 5.50 | 5.48 | 5.60 |
| 32. | **Targeting recruitment** efforts specifically toward Blacks will increase the number of Black professionals in blindness services. | 4.26 | 5.21 | 4.61 | 4.21 | 4.48 |

(cont.)

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 25. | Development of **degree granting programs** and training programs in blindness rehabilitation at historically Black colleges and universities will be an excellent way to increase the number of Blacks in blindness services. | **4.46** | **5.47** | 4.83 | 4.50 | 4.65 |
| 6. | As more Blacks work in blindness services, it will **become a more attractive** career choice for Blacks. | 4.00 | 4.16 | 3.82 | 3.68 | 4.16 |
| 19. | There are more college degree training opportunities in blindness services for Blacks than for Whites. | 1.89 | 1.68 | 1.94 | 1.93 | 1.88 |

In summary, it was agreed that greater awareness, attractiveness, and participation in blindness services by Blacks could be accomplished with more career information and publicity, targeted recruiting, more training programs at HBIs, more Blacks in the blindness field, and more college degree training for Blacks.

# Endorsement of Efforts to
## Increase Participation of Blacks

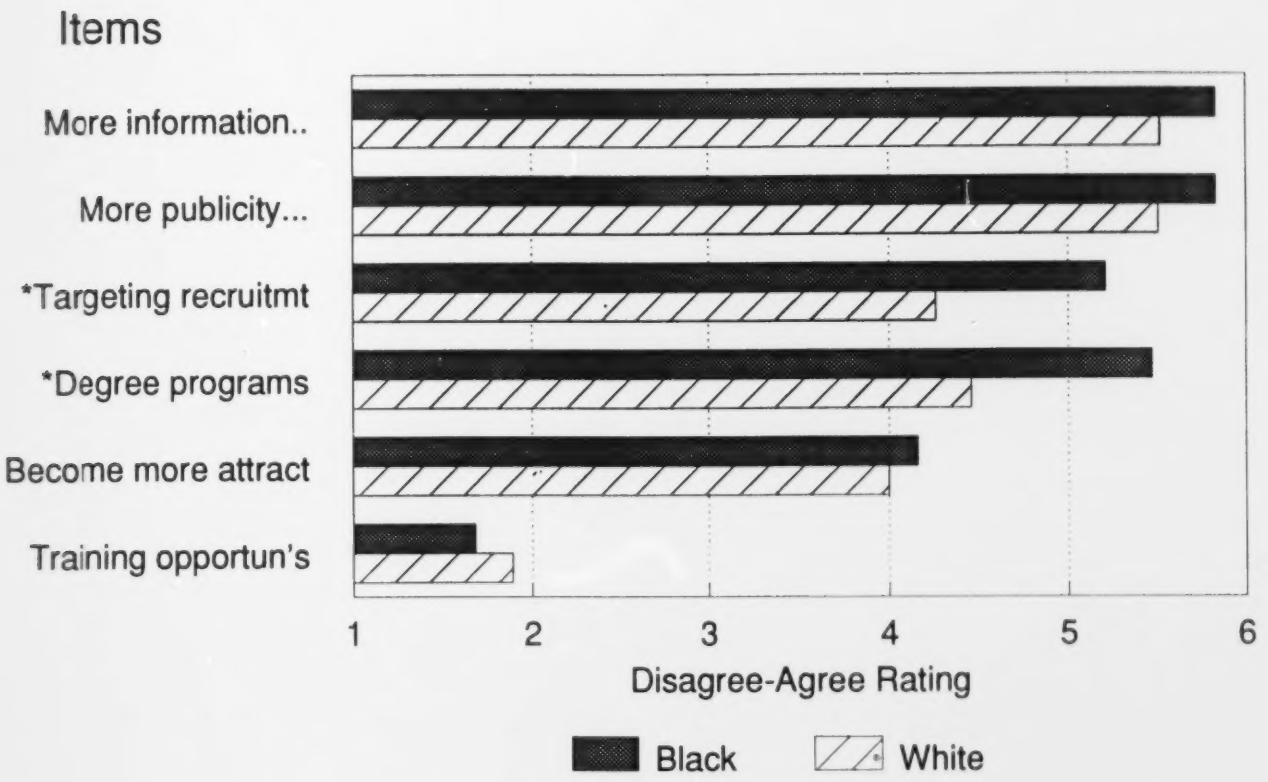



Figure 5

* p<.05

***Theme 2: Differences in Attractiveness of the Blindness Services Profession***

Black respondents tended to agree relatively more strongly (or disagree less) than White respondents to the items in this theme (Table 3). Blacks agreed significantly more than Whites with the following: working with persons who are blind is a more attractive career choice for Whites than for Blacks (Q2 and Q3), Whites seek jobs in blindness services more than Blacks (Q11), Whites are more likely than Blacks to have a mentor or advisor (Q13), and Whites are more likely than Blacks to learn about careers in blindness (Q15).

There was a significant difference in agreement by Blacks and disagreement by Whites that economic factors prevent Blacks more than Whites from moving to take jobs in blindness services (Q43).

There was overall *disagreement* (and no Black/White differences) that Blacks do not desire blindness services careers (Q1) and that Blacks do not have enough training for existing jobs in blindness (Q18). There was general disagreement that Whites are more likely than Blacks to posses the social skills for blindness services; Blacks disagreed significantly more (Q23). There was also general disagreement that low job status of blindness jobs makes the field less attractive for Blacks than for Whites; Blacks disagreed significantly less than Whites (Q4).

There were no significant difference between Blacks and Whites for the following items: the role of family and community ties (Q42), and the history of economic hardship affecting choice of jobs (Q41). Selected items are displayed graphically in Figure 6.

**Table 3. Theme 2: Differences in Attractiveness of the Blindness Services Profession**

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 2. | Human service jobs, such as blindness rehabilitation, are **popular career choices** for Whites. | **3.51** | **4.42** | 3.22 | 4.11 | 3.56 |
| 3. | Working with persons who are blind is a more **attractive career** choice for Whites than for Blacks. | **2.29** | **3.68** | 2.11 | 2.90 | 2.46 |

(cont.)

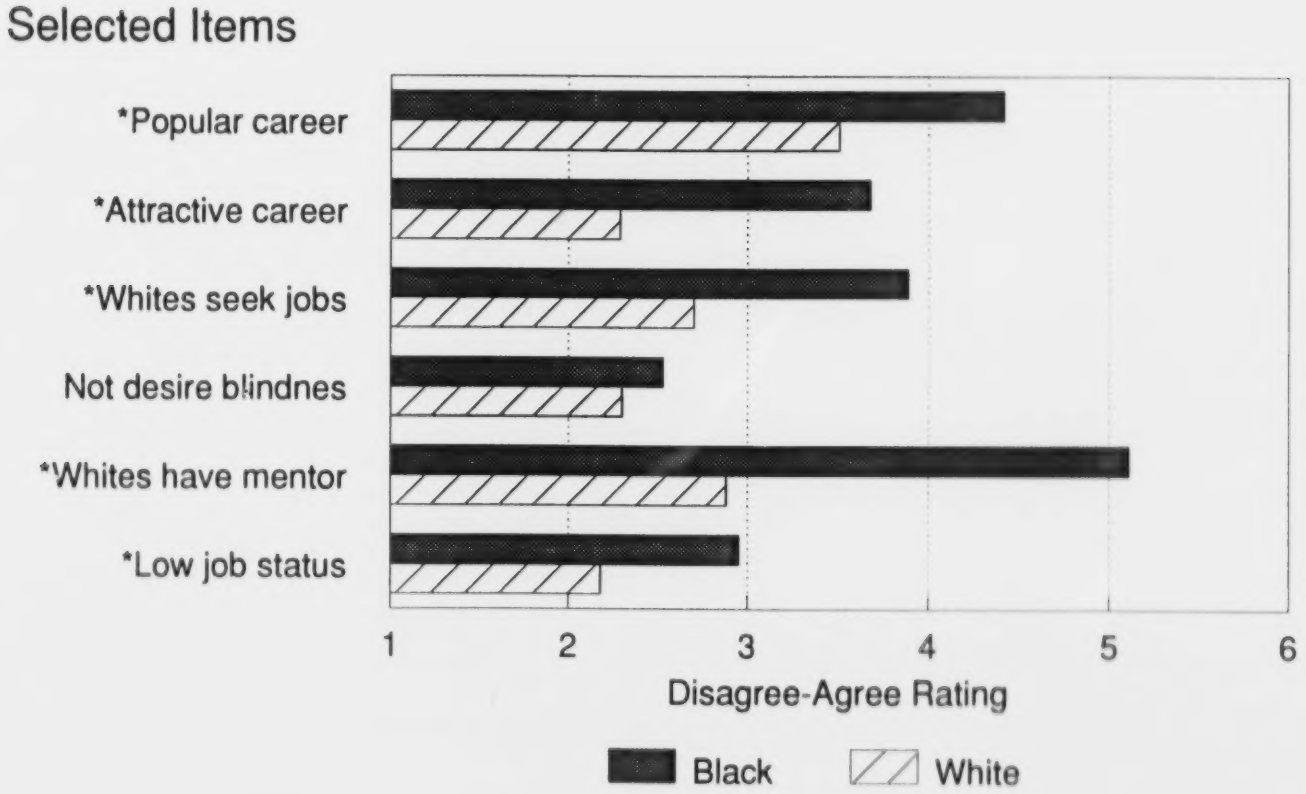
| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 11. | Whites are more likely than Blacks to **intentionally seek jobs** in blindness services. | **2.70** | **3.89** | 2.24 | 2.79 | 3.12 |
| 13. | Whites are more likely than Blacks to have a **mentor or advisor in the field** of blindness. | **2.88** | **5.11** | 2.94 | 3.40 | 3.27 |
| 15. | Whites are more likely than Blacks to **learn about careers** in blindness. | **2.82** | **5.44** | 2.83 | 3.34 | 3.29 |
| 43. | **Economic factors** prevent Blacks more than Whites from moving or relocating to take jobs in blindness services. | **2.94** | **3.79** | 3.18 | 3.47 | 2.90 |
| 1. | Blacks do **not desire blindness services** as a career choice. | 2.30 | 2.53 | 2.28 | 2.46 | 2.32 |
| 18. | Blacks do not have enough **training to qualify** for existing jobs in blindness services. | 2.10 | 2.68 | 2.24 | 2.27 | 2.21 |
| 23. | Whites are more likely than Blacks to possess the **social skills** necessary for jobs in blindness services. | **2.27** | **1.53** | 2.39 | 2.07 | 2.07 |
| 4. | The **low job status** or low respect given to employees in blindness services makes it a less attractive career choice for Blacks than for Whites. | **2.18** | **2.95** | 2.06 | 2.69 | 2.25 |

(cont.)

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 42. | **Family and community ties** prevent Blacks more than Whites from moving or relocating to take jobs in blindness services. | 3.02 | 3.32 | 2.89 | 3.27 | 3.07 |
| 41. | Due to a **history of economic hardship**, Blacks are less likely than Whites to pursue lower paying jobs such as those in blindness services. | 2.98 | 3.42 | 2.61 | 3.48 | 2.99 |

In summary, Blacks tended to agree more than Whites that a blindness career is more popular, attractive, and more sought after by Whites; and Whites more often learn about and have advisors or mentors in the blindness field. There were no Black/White differences for factors affecting moving for a job, Blacks avoiding blindness jobs due to economic hardships, Blacks lacking training, or Blacks desiring blindness services careers.

# Differences in Attractiveness of Blindness Services Profession




* p<.05

Figure 6

***Theme 3: Factors Affecting Black Participation in the Profession of Blindness Services***

Black respondents tended to agree relatively more strongly (or disagree less) than White respondents to items in this theme (Table 4). Blacks agreed significantly more than Whites that there has been little opportunity for Blacks to either move into (Q35) or move up within the blindness service profession (Q36) because there has been little turnover and few new jobs. Blacks also agreed significantly more than Whites that increased financial assistance for college and other training is an excellent way to increase participation by Blacks (Q24, Q21) (Figure 7).

**Table 4. Theme 3: Factors Affecting Black Participation in the Profession of Blindness Services**

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 35. | There has been little opportunity for Blacks to **move into** the blindness services profession because there has been almost no **turnover** or very few new jobs in this field. | **2.92** | **4.26** | 3.39 | 3.43 | 3.00 |
| 36. | There has been little opportunity for Blacks to **move up** within the blindness services profession because there has been almost no **turnover** or very few new jobs in this field. | **3.01** | **4.06** | 3.33 | 3.33 | 3.09 |
| 24. | **Financial assistance** for Black students for **training in blindness services** is an excellent way to increase the number of Blacks in blindness services. | **3.67** | **5.00** | 4.00 | 3.80 | 3.97 |

(cont.)

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 21. | Increased **financial assistance** for **college degree training** will improve the low career participation rate of Blacks more than Whites. | **3.32** | **4.26** | 3.50 | 3.46 | 3.55 |

In summary, Blacks tended to agree more than Whites that job stability and lack of new jobs have held down career participation by Blacks and that increased financial assistance for academic training will increase Black participation.

# Sex and Race of Respondents

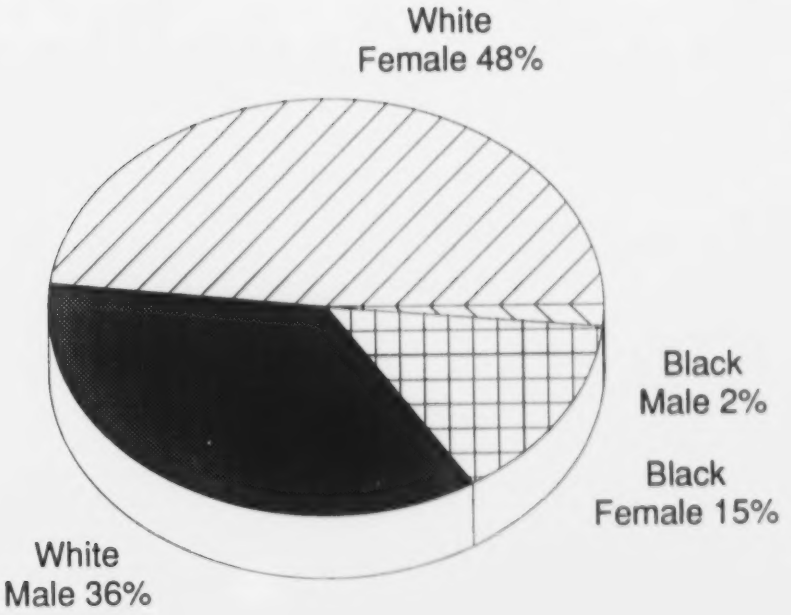



Figure 7

***Theme 4: Future Prospects for Black Participation in the Profession of Blindness Services***

White respondents tended to agree relatively more strongly than Black respondents to items in this theme (Table 5). Whites agreed significantly more than Blacks that Blacks will get their fair share of new jobs (Q39), Blacks will have access to retirement generated openings (Q38), and Blacks will have their fair share of advancement opportunities (Q40). They also agreed more than Blacks that service professionals wish to increase Black participation (Q31), government policies have increased Black participation (Q33), and financial assistance for academic training in blindness is more readily available for Blacks than for Whites (Q20).

**Table 5. Theme 4: Future Prospects for Black Participation in the Profession of Blindness Services**

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 39. | As new job opportunities occur in the blindness services profession, Blacks will get their **fair share of new jobs**. | **4.71** | **2.33** | 4.33 | 4.59 | 4.26 |
| 38. | Assuming that many blindness services professionals are approaching **retirement**, there will be **more opportunity for Blacks** to enter blindness services in the future. | **4.33** | **3.68** | 4.63 | 3.93 | 4.27 |
| 40. | As new job opportunities occur in the blindness services profession, Blacks will have their fair share of opportunities to **move up within** the profession. | **4.76** | **2.22** | 4.33 | 4.57 | 4.33 |

(cont.)

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 31. | Blindness service professionals would **like to increase Black participation** in the field. | **4.61** | **3.26** | 4.47 | 4.14 | 4.41 |
| 33. | **Government policies** have increased Black participation in the blindness profession. | **4.05** | **2.95** | 3.71 | 4.21 | 3.67 |
| 20. | **Financial assistance** for college degree blindness service training is more readily available for Blacks than for Whites. | **2.68** | **1.74** | 2.56 | 2.75 | 2.51 |

In summary, Whites tended to agree more than Blacks that Blacks will get their share of new employment opportunities generated by new jobs, retirement, or advancement; that blindness service professionals want to increase Black participation and Black opportunities; that there is more available financial assistance for training for Blacks; and that "government policies" have increased Black participation (Figure 8).

# Position Type
## by Sex and Race

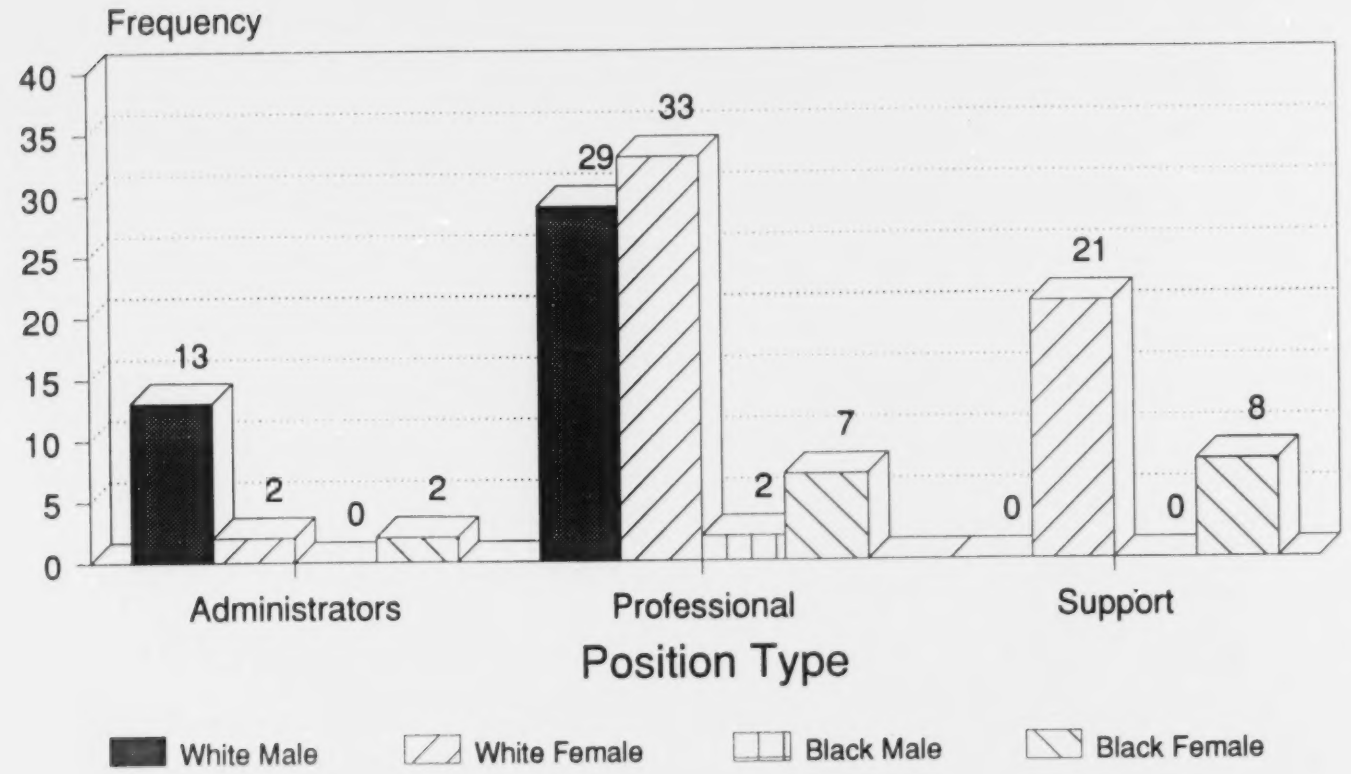



Figure 8

***Theme 5: Differences in Perceptions of Advantages and Participation in Blindness Services as Part of Society***

Black respondents tended to agree relatively more strongly (or disagree less) than White respondents on most of the questionnaire items in this theme (Table 6). Blacks agreed significantly more than Whites with the following: past discrimination practices in hiring have resulted in few Blacks in the blindness field (Q34); the "good old boy network" keeps Blacks from hearing about (Q29) and getting jobs in blindness (Q30); Whites are paid more than Blacks even though they have the same amount of training or experience (Q9); White applicants have advantages over equally qualified Black applicants (Q27); lack of opportunities for career advancement discourages Blacks more than Whites (Q37); certification and accreditation requirements are more of an employment barrier for Blacks than for Whites (Q22); Black applicants are not identified by current recruiting methods (Q28); Whites are more likely than Blacks to find out about jobs through informal channels ("the grapevine") (Q12); and career guidance programs for Black students in high school and college neglect careers in blindness services (Q14).

Black respondents disagreed less than White respondents that low salaries in blindness are more of a barrier to employment for Blacks than for Whites (Q8), better salaries in blindness services will increase the attractiveness of jobs for Blacks more than for Whites (Q7), and Blacks are more likely than Whites to stay in contact with friends and acquaintances in the blindness field (Q10).

There was no statistical difference between Black or White respondents on the item: "Blacks, due to their history and cultural traditions, are highly motivated to work with disabled persons such as persons who are blind" (Q5). Selected items are displayed graphically in Figure 9.

**Table 6. Theme 5: Differences in Perceptions of Advantages and Participation in Blindness Services as Part of Society**

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 34. | There are few Blacks in the blindness services profession because of **discrimination in past hiring** practices. | 2.46 | 4.58 | 2.47 | 2.55 | 2.94 |
| 29. | The "good old boy network" keeps Blacks from **hearing about jobs** in the blindness profession. | 2.19 | 5.00 | 2.67 | 2.30 | 2.77 |

(cont.)

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 30. | The "good old boy network" keeps Blacks from **getting jobs** in the blindness profession. | **2.01** | **5.11** | 2.44 | 2.27 | 2.60 |
| 9. | Given the same amount of training and/or experience, **Whites are paid more** than Blacks in the field of blindness. | **1.52** | **3.95** | 2.18 | 2.07 | 1.88 |
| 27. | **White applicants** for positions in blindness services **have an advantage** over equally qualified Black applicants. | 1.88 | **4.53** | 2.11 | 2.13 | 2.35 |
| 37. | Lack of opportunity for **upward mobility** (career advancement) discourages Blacks more than Whites in pursuing careers in blindness services. | **2.37** | **4.37** | 2.71 | 2.57 | 2.77 |
| 22. | Certification and **accreditation requirements** are barriers to the employment of Blacks in blindness services more than for Whites. | **2.09** | **3.74** | 2.17 | 2.57 | 2.29 |
| 28. | Potential Black applicants for positions in blindness services are **not identified** by current recruitment methods. | 2.78 | **4.95** | 3.53 | 2.67 | 3.24 |

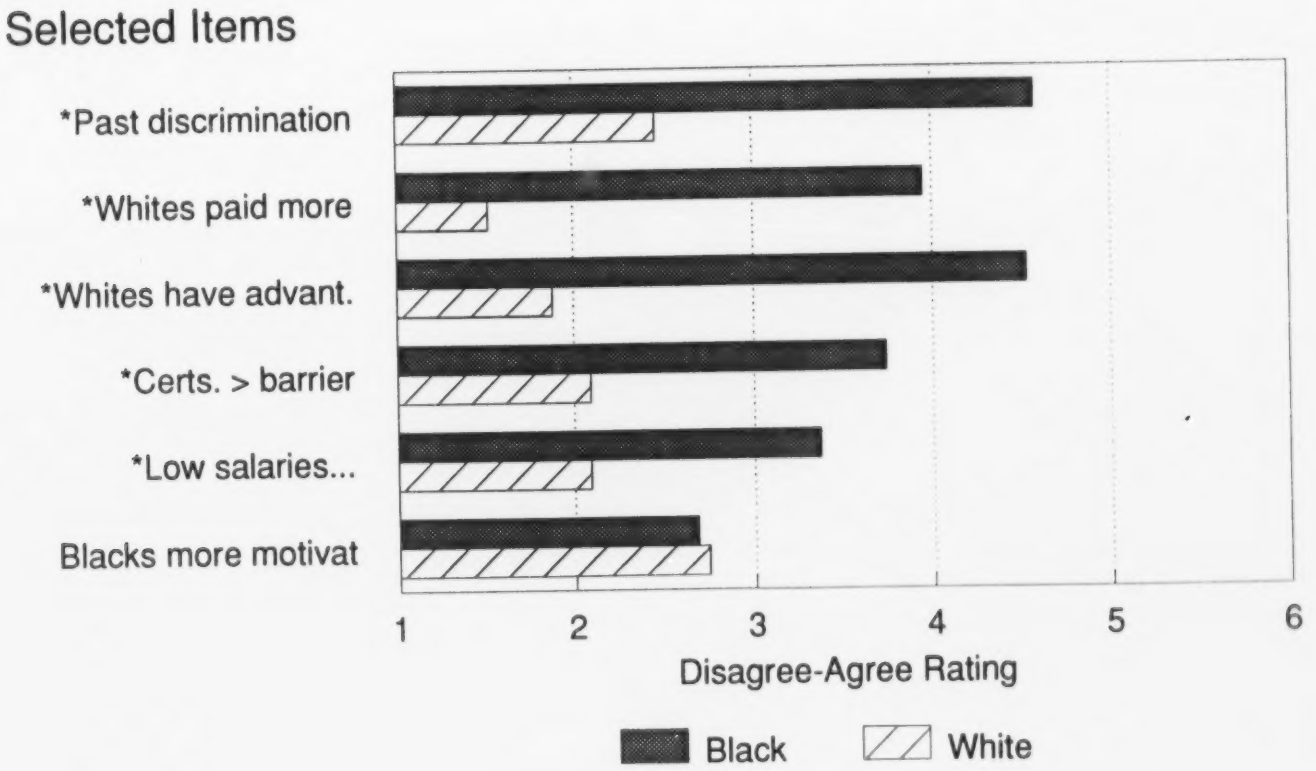
(cont.)

| | | Race | | Position | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Question | White | Black | Adm. | Sec. | Prof. |
| 12. | Whites are more likely than Blacks to **find out about job opportunities** in blindness services through informal channels such as "the grapevine". | 3.08 | 5.47 | 3.17 | 3.40 | 3.58 |
| 14. | **Career guidance programs** for Black students in high school and college neglect social service careers such as blindness services. | 2.98 | 5.22 | 2.71 | 3.50 | 3.55 |
| 8. | **Low salaries** in the field of blindness are more of a barrier to employment for Blacks than for Whites. | 2.09 | 3.37 | 2.65 | 2.21 | 2.38 |
| 7. | **Better salaries** in blindness services will increase the attractiveness of these jobs for Blacks more so than for Whites. | 2.63 | 3.79 | 2.94 | 2.79 | 2.81 |
| 10. | Blacks are more likely than Whites to **stay in contact** with friends and acquaintances in the field of blindness. | 2.02 | 3.00 | 1.88 | 2.11 | 2.37 |
| 5. | Blacks, due to their history and cultural traditions, are highly **motivated to work with disabled persons** such as persons who are blind. | 2.74 | 2.68 | 2.76 | 2.74 | 2.67 |

In summary, Blacks tend to agree more strongly than Whites that Blacks are discouraged from participation in the field of blindness rehabilitation by past hiring discrimination; lower likelihood of hearing about and getting jobs; lower pay for the same training or experience; being less advantaged when equally qualified;

being discouraged by the lower likelihood of advancement; certification and accreditation requirements; under-identification in recruiting practices; and being less likely to receive career guidance information about blindness services. Both Black and White respondents disagreed, although Blacks disagreed less than Whites, that low salaries are more of a barrier for Blacks and better salaries will increase the attractiveness of blindness profession jobs more for Blacks. Both Black and White respondents disagreed that history and culture motivated Blacks to work in a disability field such as blindness. It was further observed that Black respondents perceived Whites as having advantages; White respondents perceived Whites and Blacks as having similar advantages; and most, if not all, of these differences may be due to generalized differences in how Blacks and Whites view society in general. These views may not be unique to the blindness services field, but may be similar if questions were related to fields such as nursing, mental health, engineering, and business.

# Differences in Perceptions of
## Blindness Services as a Societal Outlook




* p<.05

Figure 9

### *Biographic and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

***Age***. At the completion of the mail survey, 126 people responded to the study. Missing responses and respondents' ability to classify themselves on this and subsequent items may result in varying sample sizes on different items. Their average age was 43 years with a range from 23 to 70 years. When separated by race, White respondents' average age was 5 years greater than Black respondents. The average age of Whites was 44 years and Blacks was 39 years. Males were 3 years older than females; the average age of males was 45 years and females was 42 years.

***Gender and race***. Sixty-one percent of the respondents were female (74 respondents) and 39% were male (48 respondents). Eighty-three percent identified themselves as White and only 16% as Black. One person in the Other category was omitted from any discussions of race in this report. Three quarters of the female respondents were White (77% or 56 White females vs. 17 Black females), however, practically all of the males were White (93% or 42 White males vs. 2 Black males).

***Marital status***. Most respondents were married (76%). Ten percent had never married, 9% were divorced, 3% were widowed, and 2% were legally separated.

***Professional status***. Fifteen percent (18 respondents) classified themselves as administrators; 25% (30 respondents) said they were secretaries; and 61% (74 respondents) were other professionals (rehabilitation counselors, instructional staff, or BEP representatives). Seventy-eight percent of the administrators indicated they were male (14 males vs. 4 females) and 88% were White (15 Whites vs. 2 Blacks). All 30 secretaries were female and 72% were White (21 Whites vs. 8 Blacks). Professionals were about equally divided between males and females (46% or 34 males vs. 54% or 40 females), but were much more heavily represented by Whites (87% or 62 Whites vs. 13% or 9 Blacks).

Of particular importance to this study, as previously stated in the Introduction, is the proportion of African Americans who were administrators (12%) and professionals engaged in service delivery (13%). Thus, the percentage of African Americans reported to be employed as professionals in blindness services (administrators or service delivery personnel) in Alabama and Mississippi was 12.5%, with Whites comprising 87.5%.

***Length of employment***. For this and all remaining analyses, secretaries were excluded from the statistics reported. The average length of employment in the blindness system was 11.5 years with a range from 1 to 30 years. White respondents had worked an average of 11.4 years and Black respondents had worked 11.7 years. While it appears that Blacks and Whites had worked for equal numbers of years in the blindness system, when the two Black outliers are excluded from the Black sample, Blacks had only been employed for 8.6 years. Females had worked an average of 9.4 years and males had worked 13.8 years. Males were employed in the field for 4.4 years more than the female respondents.

***Educational achievement***. Respondents were asked three questions about education: their own achievement, either one of their parents, and that of their spouse. The first question dealt with the highest level of education achieved by the respondent. All but 2 people had some college education (Table 7). In fact, the most frequent response was a master's degree (59%). Among the remaining categories, 1 person attended some college, 1 person graduated from a community college, 16% graduated from a senior college, 19% completed some postgraduate work, and 2 people obtained a doctorate degree.

**Table 7. Respondents' Highest Level of Education**

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| High school graduate or GED | 2 | 2.2 |
| Some college | 1 | 1.1 |
| Community or junior college graduate | 1 | 1.1 |
| Senior college or university graduate | 15 | 16.3 |
| Some postgraduate college work | 17 | 18.5 |
| Master's degree | 54 | 58.7 |
| Doctorate degree | 2 | 2.2 |
| TOTAL | 92 | 100 |

When separated by sex, the most frequent response was still the master's degree (64% females and 54% males) (Table 8). Although males were found at the three lowest educational levels, females compared equally to males at all other educational levels.

**Table 8. Highest Level of Education by Gender (Reported by Percentage)**

| Category | Female (N=44) | Male (N=48) |
|---|---|---|
| High school graduate or GED | -- | 4.2 |
| Some college | -- | 2.1 |
| Community college graduate | -- | 2.1 |
| Senior college graduate | 15.9 | 16.7 |
| Some postgraduate college work | 18.2 | 18.8 |
| Master's degree | 63.6 | 54.2 |
| Doctorate degree | 2.3 | 2.1 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 |

Regardless of racial identity, "master's degree" was the most frequent response (60% Whites and 55% Blacks) (Table 9). White respondents were spread across the entire educational spectrum from high school graduate to doctorate degree, while Black respondents were concentrated between senior college, postgraduate work, and master's degree.

**Table 9. Highest Level of Education by Race (Reported by Percentage)**

| Category | White (N=77) | Black (N=11) |
|---|---|---|
| High school graduate or GED | 2.6 | -- |
| Some college | 1.3 | -- |
| Community or junior college graduate | 1.3 | -- |
| Senior college or university graduate | 15.6 | 18.2 |
| Some postgraduate college work | 18.2 | 27.3 |
| Master's degree | 59.7 | 54.5 |
| Doctorate degree | 1.3 | -- |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 |

The researchers also wanted to know the highest level of education achieved by either of the respondents' parents (Table 10). The most frequent response was high school graduate (34%). The remaining group of respondents gave the following responses: 15% of either one of their parents did not graduate from high school, 17% completed some college work, 6% graduated from a community college, 13% graduated from a senior college, 2% completed some postgraduate work, 10% earned a master's degree, and 3% earned a doctorate degree.

**Table 10. Highest Level of Education for Either Parent and Spouse (Reported by Percentage)**

| Category | Either parent (N=91) | Spouse (N=81) |
|---|---|---|
| Less than high school graduate | 15.4 | 2.5 |
| High school graduate or GED | 34.1 | 14.8 |
| Some college | 16.5 | 18.5 |
| Community or junior college graduate | 5.5 | 12.3 |
| Senior college or university graduate | 13.2 | 17.3 |
| Some postgraduate college work | 2.2 | 7.4 |
| Master's degree | 9.9 | 25.9 |
| Doctorate degree | 3.3 | 1.2 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 |

Respondents who were ever married were asked about the highest level of education for their spouse (Table 10). The most frequent response was "master's degree" (26%). In addition, 3% of the spouses did not graduate from high school, 15% graduated from high school, 19% completed some college work, 12% graduated from a community college, 17% graduated from a senior college, 7% completed some postgraduate work, and 1% earned a doctorate degree.

***Professional organizations***. Membership in professional organizations offers networking and educational opportunities. Two of the more prominent organizations in rehabilitation are the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) and the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA). Most of the respondents (administrators and professional service delivery personnel (N=94) belonged to AER (80%). Over one third (36%) belonged to NRA and 11% belonged to other professional organizations. These percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents were free to select multiple organizations. Only 16% of the respondents had not joined any professional organization, while 35% reported holding membership in multiple organizations.

***Professional certification***. Again, for administrators and professionals only, the majority of respondents did not report any certification (60%). Nine percent of the respondents are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRCs), 21% are certified by AER, and 16% by other organizations. Again, these percentages sum to more than 100% because respondents were free to select multiple certifications. In fact, 7% reported holding multiple certifications.

### *Open-Ended Questions Included in the Survey: Summary of Write-in Answers*

Open-ended questions were included in the survey at appropriate points as relevant to the rating questions. These questions solicited general comments on aspects of the shortage of African Americans in the blindness services profession. These questions gave respondents the opportunity to elaborate on their answers to ratings and to make suggestions about the causes and solutions to shortages of Blacks in the blindness profession.

Many respondents chose not to answer some or all of the open-ended questions. However, there was a great deal of consensus among those who did answer. Responses were grouped according to general content areas or "themes". Direct quotations are inserted throughout this section to illustrate particular themes and points. Questions A, B, and C appeared only on the forms sent to administrators.

### *Open-Ended Questions for Administrators Only*

***Question A: Have specific efforts been made to attract Black professionals into your organization?***

Answers could be grouped into the following categories:

1. Seek potential applicants through personal contacts with Black community members.
2. Participate in job fairs and career days at high schools and universities.
3. Recommend appropriate training programs to Black individuals.

Here are some representative responses:

> *I have talked with different leaders in the Black community, asking them to refer potential candidates to our rehabilitation training program.*

> *[I] recommended undergraduate [and] graduate training programs to Blacks for them to become qualified for various career opportunities within rehabilitation.*

***Question B: Are there barriers in the personnel system procedures of your organization that may inhibit targeted recruiting of Blacks?***

***Question C: Are there changes which can be made in your personnel system procedures, which, in your opinion, would enhance the recruitment of Blacks?***

There were no significant answers listed for Question B or C because most administrators (88% were White) saw no barriers to recruiting Black employees into their organizations.

### *Open-Ended Questions for All Respondents*

All of the following open-ended questions appeared on the surveys sent to all three groups of employees. For each, the question is stated as a heading followed by a categorized summary of responses. The summary includes the general theme of the response category, the percentage of responses that fell into that category, and a representative direct quote, if available.

***Question 1: What might be done to make careers in blindness services more attractive to Blacks?***

***Increase publicity and awareness***. About 35% (38 responses) were appropriate for this category. Specific suggestions included participating in job fairs or careers days at schools and colleges, sharing information about opportunities in the blindness field with career counselors and teachers, and making better use of the media.

> *It is not that these careers are not attractive. The fact of the matter is [that] Blacks are just not aware of these programs or careers.*

***Raise salaries and increase benefits***. 24% (26). Suggestions were made about rates of pay, opportunities for advancement and mobility, and benefit packages. Together, these first two categories accounted for more than half of the total number of responses.

> *[Offer] better salaries, benefits, and advancement opportunities.*

***Increase educational/training opportunities and financial assistance***. 17% (18).

> *Make it [rehabilitation training] available at historically Black colleges and universities.*

*[Offer] more scholarships for economically strapped people.*

***No special techniques needed to attract Blacks***. 11% (12). Responses indicated that different techniques to attract Black and White employees were not desirable because the field is equally attractive to Blacks and Whites.

*Nothing needs to be done any more for one race than the other.*

***Use special strategies***. 14% (15). Special strategies included changes in recruiting techniques such as targeted recruitment and use of Blacks as mentors and role models.

*Recruiting should be done more directly with the universities, and aggressively recruit at Black colleges.*

*Create interest in the field [of blindness services] with some positive role models [for a person] to follow.*

***Question 2: What specific actions or activities would increase the awareness of Blacks about career opportunities in blindness services?***

***Strategic dissemination***. 83% (77). Several specific activities were categorized here, including conducting job fairs and/or high school or college career days; targeting historically Black institutions; and targeting career guidance counselors, teachers, etc. Suggestions were for improving awareness of careers in blindness services through development of various career guidance information for guidance counselors, teachers, and college career counselors; and strategic and selective use of the media to reach more African Americans.

*At career days, make the students aware of different jobs in the field of blindness and tell them about federal grants, scholarships, etc. relating to the field [of blindness rehabilitation].*

*Agencies must take part in career day activities on the Black college campus.*

*[Make] more information available at employment services, high schools, and colleges, on career opportunities.*

*Send out more ads, books, movies, brochures, etc. to let them know what blindness is all about.*

*[Develop] public service announcements about various agencies and organizations serving the blind and visually impaired.*

*Ask Black celebrities to do some public service announcements.*

***Increase training programs***. 7% (6).

*Make blindness services programs available at Black universities and colleges.*

***Provide more information on blindness and disability in general***. 5% (5). Provide information on blindness and general disability issues as opposed to providing specific information on job opportunities in the field.

*[Teach] orientation courses involving [issues of] handicapped awareness.*

*I let my acquaintances who are Black know about the high incidence of diabetes and glaucoma among Blacks and the need for more Black professionals in our field. I feel I do my part.*

***Recruit the same for Blacks as for Whites***. 6% (5). These respondents stated that they did not perceive the attractiveness of careers in blindness services for African Americans to be a problem.

*[Use] the same actions or activities that increase White awareness about career opportunities in blindness services.*

***Question 3: What are ways of increasing Black participation in training programs that could lead to careers in blindness services?***

***Create better publicity about careers in blindness services and training programs***. 45% (36). In addition to publicity, use Black role models, and have Black professionals in the field of blindness conduct programs for blindness careers.

*Have brochures printed up with [information about] the blindness service training and which colleges offer scholarships to high school students.*

***Increase funding for scholarships or loan programs for minority students***. 29% (23).

*Offer some financial assistance to students enrolled in careers that lead to employment in blindness services.*

*[Provide] money, scholarships, living expenses, and even agency sponsorships of students with the commitment of future employment.*

***Develop more or different training programs***. 16% (13). Develop degree granting programs and training programs in blindness at Black colleges.

***Recruit Blacks and Whites equally for training programs***. 10% (8).

*Do away with "good old boy" hiring practices.*

*[Use] the same ways that are available to all others.*

***Question 4: How can hiring practices be changed to recruit and to hire more Blacks in blindness services?***

***Increase the pool of qualified Black applicants***. 52% (41). Suggestions included education, active and appropriately targeted recruiting, Black role models, and other means.

*Recruitment efforts aimed specifically towards Blacks will increase the number of Blacks in blindness services.*

*Employers need to have a real commitment to affirmative action.*

*Participation by blindness services professionals at career day programs and in college and university-level job fairs can increase and improve recruitment and hiring of more Blacks.*

*As more Blacks go into training in the blindness field, more Blacks will be hired.*

*Utilize existing Black employees in recruitment. Main factor: [There] are few Blacks in management.*

***Hire the most qualified person regardless of race; eliminate discrimination***. 41% (32).

*I would like to see more participation in the field of blindness by African Americans, but I would not want them to be hired solely on the basis of ethnicity. This sort of inclusion is as handicapping as exclusion and does not ensure qualified staff.*

*[Establish] fair hiring practice[s]. Hire employees based on skill and education and not [because they are a] "friend of [a] friend" [or a] "spouse of a spouse" in the field [of blindness services]. Eliminate the good old boy network!*

*Employers need to have a real commitment to affirmative action.*

***The current hiring system does not discriminates against Blacks***. 8% (6).

*I do not see any need for changes. Blacks have as much opportunity as Whites in meeting the necessary criteria for job placement.*

*Blacks and Whites qualify for jobs at the same rate.*

***Question 5: How can Blacks have real opportunities for new jobs in blindness services?***

***Appropriately prepare and increase awareness***. 55% (41).

*They [Blacks] need to have an appropriate educational degree, preferably an M.A.*

*Have qualifications to fill positions.*

*Become more aware of these job opportunities and go after them in an aggressive manner.*

*Take advantage of jobs opening. Keep in contact with proper sources. Follow up on vital information. Prepare and equip themselves physically and mentally for the mishaps that might occur with this job.*

***Motivate; use networks and mentors***. 22% (16).

*Have a desire to work. Work hard. Meet standards. Do not remind supervisors that they will need special treatment because they are Black.*

*First start with Black colleges. Set up mentor programs. Let Black professions model the way.*

*[Blacks can have real opportunities for new jobs] if there are new job opportunities, and assistance from job development specialists and advocate groups such as [the] Council for the Blind.*

***There are no differences in opportunities; eliminate discrimination***. 23% (17).

*In our organization, I don't feel that Blacks can't move up in our profession; if you're qualified for the job is the main criterion.*

*Apply just like anyone else.*

*The employer must be willing to put his/her personal feelings on the backseat and make a decision based on a person's training and ability to do the job.*

***Question 6: What can be done to overcome possible difficulties associated with moving or relocation for Blacks in taking jobs in blindness services?***

In general, all of the comments from this question fell into one of two categories: (a) Offer assistance or (b) this issue is not a problem.

***Offer financial assistance and flexibility***. 62% (29).

*The agency [should] pay for the move if they want the person to work for them; Also [provide] housing allowance until they get established.*

*Service providers can provide or at least assist with relocation expenses, also with interviewing expenses. Not many people like to leave home, but to take on a crushing debt deters more than does family ties.*

*Assist with the move and offer higher salary.*

*[Provide] assistance with introductions within the Black community.*

*Supervisors and administrators [could be] more flexible about where the person could live and do their job.*

***This is not a problem: Treat Blacks and Whites the same***. 38% (18).

*I do not understand how this is a problem. People today have to realize that you live where there is work.*

*Relocation compensation should be offered to all potential career employees.*

***Question 7: What other specific actions or activities could lead to increased participation by Blacks in blindness services careers?***

Answers to this question were basically a repetition of answers to previous questions: Increase awareness about blindness careers ($n$ = 9); improve recruitment and employment setting ($n$ = 21), including increasing salaries and improving benefits, eliminating discrimination, developing Black role models, and addressing the problem of Black participation in rehabilitation; and improve training programs ($n$ = 2).

## *Interviews of Black Professionals in Services to Individuals Who are Blind*

### *Initial Interview*

Black professionals involved in these one-on-one interviews were drawn from institutions and agencies that serve persons who are blind in Alabama and Mississippi. Thirty-three percent of the sample were from Alabama with the remaining portion coming from Mississippi. In this interview, there were 18 open-ended items. The following discussion categorizes responses under each of the 18 items.

**Interview Question 1: Are career choices in blindness services usually of interest to Blacks? Why or why not?** The majority of interviewees felt that career choices in blindness were of interest to Blacks, but Blacks generally were unaware of the range of possibilities.

**Interview Question 2: What are the factors, in your opinion, that keep Blacks from entering professional services to the blind? What is most important and why?** Factors keeping Blacks from entering services in the blindness field included: (a) lack of awareness of opportunities, (b) lack of focus on blindness at academic institutions attended by most Blacks, and (c) lack of recruitment efforts towards Blacks.

**Interview Question 3: It is suggested that the low job status or prestige associated with blindness services makes it less attractive to Blacks. How would you respond to this claim?** The perceived lack of prestige in this area was not considered an important factor.

**Interview Question 4: Are there salary disparities between White and Black professionals in the field of blindness? If so, why?** The majority of respondents felt that there are salary disparities between Black and White professionals; Blacks generally receive a lower wage.

**Interview Question 5: How would you respond to the statement that Whites are more likely than Blacks to seek jobs in blindness services?** Whites were perceived as more likely than Blacks to seek jobs in blindness services. Respondents believed that this was due to the fact that Whites, through word of mouth, a "buddy system," and traditional involvement with blindness services, would know more about opportunities and options in the field.

**Interview Question 6: Do you see any problems or conditions within blindness services that may impede or militate against Blacks gaining entrance?** With regard to conditions within blindness services that may impede or militate against Blacks gaining entrance, most respondents noted the following:

1. An "old boy" system works against Blacks.
2. Blacks in academic preparation tend to seek employment where Blacks are already established.

The respondents' answers implied that services to the blind are not areas that have traditionally employed Black professionals in large numbers.

**Interview Question 7: Do you see certification and accreditation as factors impeding Blacks in blindness services? If so, how?** While certification was seen as a factor that could facilitate entrance to the blindness profession and encourage upward movement within blindness services, the majority of respondents did not perceive it as an impediment to Blacks.

**Interview Question 8: What, if any, role do you feel historically Black colleges and universities can play in increasing Black interest and professional involvement in blindness services?** Most respondents believed that historically Black institutions can increase the interest of Blacks in professional services to persons who are blind by establishing curricula or programs in the area of blindness, making students aware of opportunities, and providing support through scholarships or assistantships.

**Interview Question 9: Are there present advantages that Whites hold over Blacks in applying for employment in blindness services? If so, what are they?** The main advantages Whites were perceived as having over Blacks in applying for employment were awareness of opportunities, and personal and professional contacts.

**Interview Question 10: Do you consider blindness service professionals or agencies as interested in increasing Black participation? If not, why?** These agencies were seen by the majority of respondents as increasing Black participation, in general, to meet federal guidelines on minimum representation.

**Interview Question 11: How can hiring practices be changed to encourage more Blacks in blindness services?** The hiring practices necessary to encourage more Blacks into blindness services were the following:

1. Target Blacks during recruitment.
2. Exert extra effort to advertise blindness services in Black institutions.
3. Identify qualified Blacks.

**Interview Question 12: Do you see any discriminatory practices that inhibit Black employment? If yes, what are they?** While discriminatory practices are seen as having declined, they are still considered to exist to a certain extent.

**Interview Question 13: Do Black employees have equal chances and opportunities for upward mobility in blindness services? If not, why?** While Blacks are not perceived as having equal opportunities as Whites in services to people who are blind, conditions are seen as having improved when compared to the past.

**Interview Question 14: Are Blacks adequately aware of career opportunities in blindness services? What can be done to increase awareness?** The majority of respondents felt that Blacks are not adequately aware of opportunities in blindness.

**Interview Question 15: How, in your opinion, can recruitment practices be improved to increase Black participation?** Recruitment could be improved by targeting Blacks in college and higher education, and developing educational programs to provide professional training.

**Interview Question 16: Are there any roles that the federal or state governments can play to increase Black participation in blindness services?** Federal and state governments can increase Black participation through the following:

1. Advertise in the Black community.
2. Provide scholarships.
3. Support programs at historically Black schools that prepare students to work as professionals in services to people who are blind.

**Interview Question 17: What are your feelings about future possibilities for Blacks in blindness services?** Respondents believed that:

1. Conditions will remain basically the same as they are today.
2. Improvement will be slow.
3. Blacks will have to take greater advantage of existing opportunities.

**Interview Question 18: Is the level of participation of Blacks in other social service professions (such as mental health, social work, nursing) greater than in blindness services? If so, why? If not, why not?** Respondents stated that the levels of participation in some of these services seemed generally greater, although many did not have enough information to respond to the question.

***Follow-Up Interviews of Black Professionals***

Following the preliminary evaluation of the Black Professionals Interview, it was recognized that there were a number of demographic and other variables that were not considered during the first interview. Therefore, a follow-up interview was developed to include information about age, specific professional training, and years of employment in services to the blind. In addition, content questions were included which dealt with special circumstances that keep Blacks from entering blindness services, whether Whites hold hiring advantages, whether agencies are interested in increasing Black participation, whether Black employees have equal opportunities for upward mobility, feelings about future possibilities for services, and perceptions of relative salary.

Of the initial interview sample (N=15), only 11 respondents were available. One declined to be interviewed; 1 was no longer employed with the agency; and after several calls, the researchers were unable to establish contact with others of the original group. Of 11 respondents, 6 had master's degrees and 5 had B.A. or B.S. degrees. Eight had training in rehabilitation or special education, while 3 were trained in physical education. All of the respondents perceived Whites as having varying degrees of advantage over Blacks (buddy system, people in hiring positions not wanting minorities, knowledge of who will be hired before vacancies occur, and information passed among Whites).

In response to a question as to whether blindness service agencies are interested in hiring Blacks, 5 respondents said "no;" their employment in blindness services were 10, 13, 23, 17, and 29 years. The response, "They say it, but do not mean it," was by a respondent with 28 years of employment. The response, "They say they are, but you have to be more qualified than they are," was from a respondent with 16 years of service. Two respondents who said they "did not know," or "did not think so," had 8 and 10 years of service employment. The 2 respondents who said "yes" had 16 months and 2.4 years of employment with the agency. From this data, it appears that those responding negatively to this question had been employed in blindness services from 8 to 28 years; those responding positively had shorter employment periods (16 months and 2.4 years).

Another question, which related to respondents' perception of future possibilities for Blacks in blindness services, yielded the following results: "no movement expected;" "not optimistic unless there is a national initiative;" "hopeful, if system changes;" "unless Blacks are more aggressive, they will not get in;" "guarded optimism;" and "if pressure is kept up".

When responses to this latter question are compared with years of employment, an inverse relationship emerges between years of employment and degree of expressed optimism. With the exception of 1 respondent who had 19 years of employment, respondents with the fewest years of employment with blindness services, reflected the highest degree of optimism about future possibilities for Black professionals in blindness services.

### *Summary Conclusions and Recommendations*

#### *From Agency Data*

As noted previously, census estimates indicated that in Alabama and Mississippi, approximately 29% of the population were African American and 71% were White and Other subgroups. Data from the state agencies serving persons who are blind indicted that during the reporting period, 34% of the clients were Black and 66% were White or Other. The two state agency staffs were 13% Black and 87% White (Figure 10). These data indicate that the proportion of African American clients is about 10% higher than their proportion in the population and that the proportion of African American in blindness services is about 16% less than their proportion in the Alabama/Mississippi population. Less than 3 in 10 in the Alabama/Mississippi population are Black. Among clients of state VR agencies serving persons who are blind, about 3.4 in 10 are Black. Among service providers, 1.3 in 10 are Black. In Alabama and Mississippi, African Americans are over-represented as clients and under-represented as professional providers in VR services for persons who are blind.

#### *From Administrators' Ratings*

Recommendations from administrators' open-ended questions were the following: (a) With respect to recruiting, more specific efforts and active plans may increase the level of participation of Blacks in blindness services; (b) While better entry pay levels may increase the attractiveness of employment in the field, it would not be expected to increase participation more for Black than for White employees; (c) Administrators do not view the current personnel system as a problem or barrier, but there is indication that changes could be made to enhance recruitment of Black professionals; and (d) There is an expectation that more Black professionals will enhance the quality of service delivery to Black clients.

# African Americans In State, As Clients, and As Providers: Alabama and Mississippi

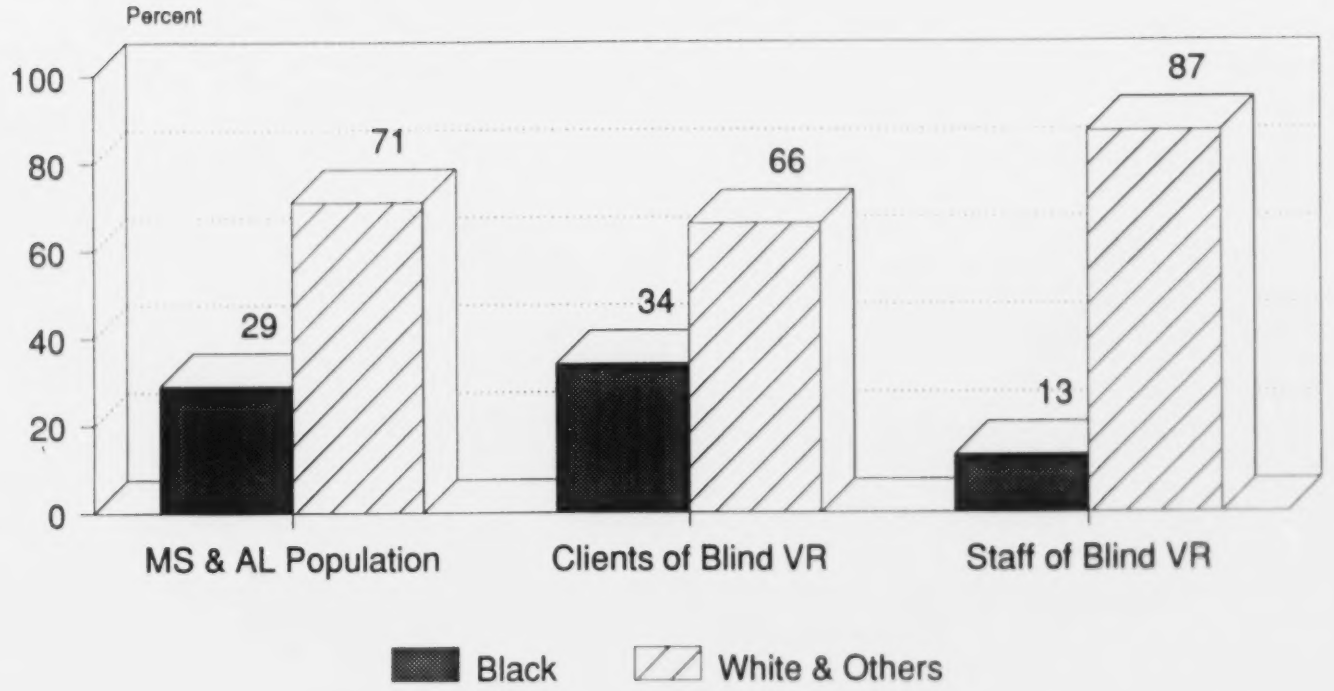



Figure 10

***From Survey Ratings***

Because of the wording of many of the rating questions, the results from the survey were often couched in terms of different levels of agreement or disagreement between Black and White respondents. For items that dealt with awareness, attractiveness, and participation, there was considerable agreement about what would increase Black participation in blindness services. These issues can be summarized under *increase information, dissemination, and publicity; and develop more training programs, particularly at HBIs*. These conclusions from survey ratings are highly consistent with write-in survey responses and with interview results.

Ratings indicated that there were substantial Black/White differences in the perceptions of attractiveness of working in blindness services. In general, the view was that Whites have advantages in hearing about, seeking, being prepared for, getting, holding, and advancing in blindness services jobs. These results were also generally consistent with write-in and interview responses. In general, Whites were more optimistic than Blacks.

Ratings also indicated that there were differences in perceptions about the impact of job stability and lack of new jobs on the low level of career participation by Blacks, and the impact of increased financial assistance for training on Black participation.

There were also differences in perceptions regarding Blacks getting their fair share of new jobs and the impact of "government policies" on participation by Blacks. And lastly, it was the view that Blacks have been at a disadvantage "across the board" in employment in blindness services, including past discrimination; less awareness; and less opportunity for training, employment, and advancement.

***From Survey Open-Ended Questions***

Review of the summarized responses from these questions showed some emerging themes that were repeated across many of the questions. The decision to seek employment in the field of services to persons who are blind, as with any other occupational choice, is a decisional process. That process has several sequential steps. Some of the steps to a job include awareness of the field as an occupational choice; attractiveness, incentives, barriers, and motivational factors; preparation and opportunities for appropriate education and training; "connecting" with employers; and "landing" the job. Another perspective relates to what individuals and organizations can do to facilitate persons choosing to enter the occupational field. The themes from the survey questions are discussed in these contexts.

***Attracting Black Professionals: Current Efforts***

Administrators indicated that specific efforts have been made to attract Black professionals into the field of services to persons who are blind. They indicated that personal contacts were made, there was participation in job fairs and career days, and appropriate education and training opportunities were recommended to Black potential employees. Interestingly, the administrators, as a group of which 88% were White, did not see barriers to the recruiting of Black employees into their organizations.

***Making Careers in Blindness Services More Visible and Attractive***

Responses from all participants (administrators, professionals, and secretaries) indicated that several things could be done to make careers in blindness services more visible and attractive to Blacks.

* ***Increase publicity and awareness***: develop better publicity strategies (job fairs, career days); implement direct contacts with career counselors; develop special publications and brochures; make better use of available media including targeting to reach more African Americans, targeting historically Black institutions, using Blacks as mentors and role models; and provide more information about blindness and disability in general.
* ***Increase salaries and benefits***: offer better pay, benefits, and advancement opportunities.
* ***Increase training programs***: provide more educational and training opportunities, and financial assistance to participants.

***Increasing Participation of African Americans in Training Programs***

Strategies suggested here were similar to those for increasing visibility and attractiveness.

* ***Improve publicity about careers and training programs in blindness services.***
* ***Increase scholarships and loan programs for minority students.***
* ***Develop more or different training programs***: target historically Black institutions.

***Recruiting, Hiring Practices, Real Job Opportunities***

* ***Use strategies to increase Black applicants***: target the recruitment and use of Black role models.
* ***Make commitment to eliminate discrimination.***
* ***Advocate preparedness***: increase awareness, motivation, appropriate preparation, networking, and mentors.
* ***Encourage employer flexibility***: help meet job transition needs

(interviews, moves, etc.).

### *Summary of Perceptions From Interviews of Black Professionals*

Several themes emerged from these interviews, many of which were consistent with written comments on the survey.

* The low level of participation of Blacks in blindness services careers was not due to lack of interest or perceived low prestige, but rather due to lack of awareness and lack of focus on recruiting Blacks.

* The lack of awareness was due mainly to lack of focus on disability and rehabilitation-related careers, such as blindness, at educational institutions mostly attended by Blacks.

* Whites were more likely than Blacks to seek jobs in blindness services because Whites were more likely to (a) learn about jobs through informal networks ("contacts"), and (b) know more about opportunities and options (awareness) due to traditional involvement with the field.

* Barriers to Blacks in blindness services were (a) informal networks ("old boy" system) that did not include Blacks, and (b) a tendency for Blacks to seek academic preparation in areas where Blacks were already employed.

* Certification and accreditation standards were not seen as an impediment to Blacks in blindness services.

* Historically Black institutions were seen as important for (a) increasing awareness of careers in blindness services, (b) providing increased educational and training opportunities in the field, and (c) providing financial incentives.

* Black employment could be increased through targeted recruitment and a focus on Black institutions.

* Discriminatory practices were seen as declining, but still existing to a certain extent. Blacks were paid less. Agencies were seen as increasing Black participation, at least to minimal levels. Opportunities for upward mobility were seen as improved, but still favoring Whites.

### *Final Conclusions*

The responsibility for implementing efforts to increase the participation of African Americans in blindness services lies with all who may read this report. This includes blindness service professionals and administrators in state and private rehabilitation agencies, blindness rehabilitation educators and trainers, members and leaders in blindness consumer organizations, researchers, consumers, and students or potential career employees willing to accept the challenge of a career in rehabilitation of persons who are blind. While implementations cannot be forced, they can be facilitated.

### *Implications*

As more Blacks become employed in blindness services, they will become part of the informal social network in this field. This will increase awareness and information flow about jobs to other Blacks. Also, with more Blacks in the field, attractiveness of the field should increase since potential Black employees will identify with other Black professionals who may be role models and mentors.

The scope of VR of persons who are blind or visually impaired falls short of the potential population who may benefit from services. Consider the following estimates. There are 6,613,803 persons in Alabama and Mississippi. African Americans comprise 29% or 1,937,844 persons, of whom 6% (based on visual impairment rate for those over age 40) are visually impaired or legally blind (Prevent Blindness America, 1994). Six percent equals 118,668 African Americans who are visually impaired or blind. Yet, the yearly average served by blindness VR agencies in all ethnic groups in both states is only about 4,000 persons. Clearly, the potential population far exceeds the number served. Certainly, there is room for growth in numbers served and efforts to provide outreach to African Americans. Greater levels of professional participation by African Americans in blindness services bodes well toward reaching these groups. The ability of agencies in reaching the unserved African Americans who are blind or visually impaired could be dramatically improved.

### *What's Underway*

At the time of this writing, a cooperative training program in vision rehabilitation is being developed at Alabama A&M University in cooperation with the RRTC on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University, sponsored by a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Alabama A&M University students enrolled in the new master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling will have the opportunity to take 12 credit hours specific to visual impairment during the summer term. Instructions for the students will be provided by the RRTC on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University.

***The Future***

This is the situation in two Southern states in a region with a relatively high percentage of African Americans and a region with a high incidence rate of blindness and visual impairment. An interesting question is whether or not the pattern found in these states is different from the country as a whole. To address this question, the next study in this research series will examine the level of participation of African Americans in blindness services for the nation as a whole. A national survey is slated which will provide additional state agency data, and information about views and opinions of agency administrators over the entire United States.

## REFERENCES


Asbury, C. A., Walker, S., Maholmes, V., Rackley, R., & White, S. (1991). *Disability prevalence and demographic association among race/ethnic minority populations in the United States: Implications for the 21st century*. Washington, DC: The Howard University Research and Training Center for Access to Rehabilitation and Economic Opportunity, School of Education, Howard University.

Atkins, B. J. (1993). Enhancing the rehabilitation tapestry. In R. N. Pacinelli and S. N. Gunn, *Renewing the commitment, meeting the challenge and shaping the future*. Proceedings of a 1993 Conference - NCRE, RSA, and CSAVR, pp. 56-65, Washington, DC: George Washington University, Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program.

Atkins, B. J., & Wright, G. N. (1980). Three views: Vocational rehabilitation of Blacks - The statement. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, April/May/June, 40-46.

Bowe, F. (1985). *Black adults with disabilities*. A statistical report drawn from census bureau data.

Bowe, F. (1992). *Black adults with disabilities: A portrait*. Unpublished manuscript, Hofstra University, Counseling, Research, Special Education, and Rehabilitation Department, Hempstead, NY.

Danek, M. M., & Lawrence, R. E. (1982). Client-counselor racial similarity and rehabilitation outcomes. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, *48*(3), 54-58.

Fairweather, G. W. (1977). *Experimental methods for social policy research*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Hill, E. W., & Jacobson, W. H. (1986). Controversial issues in orientation and mobility: Then and now. *Education of the Visually Handicapped*, *17*(2), 59-70.

Kahn, H. A., & Moorehead, H. B. (1973). *Model reporting area on blindness statistics, 1969 #70*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Kirchner, C. (1985). *Data on blindness and visual impairment in the U.S.: A resource manual on characteristics, education, employment and service delivery*. New York: American Foundation for the Blind.

Kirchner, C., & Peterson, R. (1981). Estimates of race-ethnic groups in the U.S.: Visually impaired and blind population. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 75*(2), 73-76.

Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science.* New York: Harper.

National Center for Health Statistics. (1977). *Health and nutrition examination survey: Monocular visual acuity of persons 4-74 years, United States--1971-1972.* Vital and Health Statistics Series 11, no. 201. Rockville, MD: Author.

National Center for Health Statistics and National Center for Health Service Research. (1977). *Health Interview Survey, United States, 1976-1977,* Hyattsville, MD: Author.

Prevent Blindness America. (1994). *Vision problems in the U.S.* Schaumburg, IL: Author.

Ruiz, P. (1983). Clinical care update: The minority patient. *Community Mental Health Journal, 21*(3), 208-216.

*Statistical package for the social sciences reference guide. (1990).* Chicago, IL: SPSS Inc.

Tedder, N. E., & Maxson, J. H. (1990). *The Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program: Site selection.* Mississippi State: Mississippi State University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision.

Thornhill, H. L., & HoSong, D. A. (1988). Poverty, race and disability. In S. Walker, J. E. Fowler, R. W. Nichols, & K. Turner (Eds.), *Building bridges to independence: Employment, successes, problems, and needs of African-Americans with disabilities* (pp. 148-156). Washington, DC: The Center for the Study of Handicapped Children and Youth, School of Education, Howard University.

Tielsch, J. M., Sommer, A., Witt, K., Katz, J., Royall, R. M., & the Baltimore Eye Survey Research Group. (1990). Blindness and visual impairment in an American urban population. *Achieves of Ophthalmology*, 108, 286-290.

United States Bureau of the Census (1992a). *1990 census of population: General population characteristics: Mississippi, May 1992.* Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

United States Bureau of the Census (1992b). *1990 census of population and housing* [on-line]. Available Gopher: spinaltap.micro.umn.edu/Ebooks/By title, 1990 Census Information/Alabama, .../Mississippi.

United States Bureau of the Census. (1995). *United States population estimates, by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin*. Population Division release PPL-21 [on-line]. Available Gopher: gopher.census.gov.

United Way of America (1987). *What lies ahead: Looking toward the 90's*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Uslan, M. M., Hill, E. W., & Peck, A. F. (1989). *The profession of orientation and mobility in the 1980's: The AFB competency study*. New York, NY: American Foundation for the Blind.

Walker, S., Akpati, E., Roberts, V., Palmer, R., & Newson, M. (1986). In A. M. Banner, F. Z. Belgrave, R. W. Nicholls, & S. Walker (Eds.), *Equal to the challenge*, pp. 27-38. Washington, DC: Bureau of Educational Research, School of Education, Howard University.

White, W. F. (1991). *Participatory action research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

# Appendices

# Appendix A

# Agency Data Form

PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONS
for
AGENCY ADMINISTRATORS

*Note. These questions are to be sent out in advance to each agency to get some actual data from their records. This is not part of the survey.*

1. How many blind and visually impaired persons have been served by your organization in the past three years?*

   October 1, 1989 - September 30, 1990 _____

   October 1, 1990 - September 30, 1991 _____

   October 1, 1991 - September 30, 1992 _____

2. How many blind and visually impaired persons served by your organization were minority individuals?*

   October 1, 1989 - September 30, 1990 _____

   October 1, 1990 - September 30, 1991 _____

   October 1, 1991 - September 30, 1992 _____

3. How many professional staff vacancies have you had in your organization serving people who are blind in the past three years?*

   October 1, 1989 - September 30, 1990 _____

   October 1, 1990 - September 30, 1991 _____

   October 1, 1991 - September 30, 1992 _____

* If your records are kept on a different Fiscal Year, please cross out the dates and insert the ones used by your organization.

_____
AGENCY

_____
CONTACT PERSON

# Appendix B

# Survey Instrument

## Participation of African Americans in the Profession of Services to Persons who are Blind: *A Survey of Perceptions and Barriers*

**Instructions**. There are three types of items in this survey. Some are statements with a rating scale to indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement; some are questions that ask for a brief written response; and there are some that ask you to provide general information about yourself.

A. Have specific efforts been made to attract Black professionals into your organization? Yes ☐ No ☐. If yes, please describe these efforts.

B. Are there barriers in the personnel system procedures of your organization that may inhibit targeted recruiting of Blacks? Yes ☐ No ☐. If yes, please describe.

C. Are there changes which can be made in your personnel system procedures, which, in your opinion, would enhance the recruitment of Blacks?
Yes ☐ No ☐. If yes, please describe.

D. What is the approximate age range of the professional employees in your organization? _____

E. What is the approximate average age of the professional employees in your organization? _____

**Please circle the number that indicates your agreement or disagreement with each statement. The rating scale is from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree".**

| | Strongly disagree | | | | | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F. We are unable to attract qualified Black professional employees due to our entry level pay scale. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| G. Policy makers in this organization have an active plan to encourage recruitment of qualified Black employees. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| H. The lack of Black administrators inhibits efforts at recruiting qualified Black employees. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| I. The personnel system procedures of this organization present barriers to targeted recruiting of Blacks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| J. More Black professional employees will enhance the quality of service delivery. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| K. More Black professional employees will enhance the quality of service delivery to Black clients. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 1. Blacks do not desire blindness services as a career choice. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. Human service jobs, such as blindness rehabilitation, are popular career choices for Whites. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 3. Working with persons who are blind is a more attractive career choice for Whites than for Blacks. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 4. The low job status or low respect given to employees in blindness services makes it a less attractive career choice for Blacks than for Whites. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 5. Blacks, due to their history and cultural traditions, are highly motivated to work with disabled persons such as persons who are blind. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 6. As more Blacks work in blindness services, it will become a more attractive career choice for Blacks. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 7. Better salaries in blindness services will increase the attractiveness of these jobs for Blacks more so than for Whites. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 8. Low salaries in the field of blindness are more of a barrier to employment for Blacks than for Whites. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 9. Given the same amount of training and/or experience, Whites are paid more than Blacks in the field of blindness. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 10. Blacks are more likely than Whites to stay in contact with friends and acquaintances in the field of blindness. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 11. Whites are more likely than Blacks to intentionally seek jobs in blindness services. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

**What might be done to make careers in blindness services more attractive to Blacks?**

| | Strongly disagree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|
| 12. Whites are more likely than Blacks to find out about job opportunities in blindness services through informal channels such as "the grapevine". | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 13. | Whites are more likely than Blacks to have a mentor or advisor in the field of blindness. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 14. | Career guidance programs for Black students in high school and college neglect social service careers such as blindness services. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 15. | Whites are more likely than Blacks to learn about careers in blindness. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 16. | More information on professions in blindness services at high school and college career days will greatly increase awareness of careers in blindness. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 17. | More publicity about blindness and/or blindness professionals will increase awareness of career opportunities. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

**What specific actions or activities would increase the awareness of Blacks about career opportunities in blindness services?**

| | | Strongly disagree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 18. | Blacks do not have enough training to qualify for existing jobs in blindness services. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | |
| 19. | There are more college degree training opportunities in blindness services for Blacks than for Whites. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | |
| 20. | Financial assistance for college degree blindness service training is more readily available for Blacks than for Whites. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | |
| 21. | Increased financial assistance for college degree training will improve the low career participation rate of Blacks more than Whites. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | |
| 22. | Certification and accreditation requirements are barriers to the employment of Blacks in blindness services more than for Whites. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 23. | Whites are more likely than Blacks to possess the social skills necessary for jobs in blindness services. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 24. | Financial assistance for Black students for training in blindness services is an excellent way to increase the number of Blacks in blindness services. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 25. | Development of degree granting programs and training programs in blindness rehabilitation at historically Black colleges and universities will be an excellent way to increase the number of Blacks in blindness services. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

**What are ways of increasing Black participation in training programs that could lead to careers in blindness services?**

| | | Strongly disagree | | | | | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 27. | White applicants for positions in blindness services have an advantage over equally qualified Black applicants. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 28. | Potential Black applicants for positions in blindness services are not identified by current recruitment methods. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 29. | The "good old boy network" keeps Blacks from hearing about jobs in the blindness profession. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 30. | The "good old boy network" keeps Blacks from getting jobs in the blindness profession. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 31. | Blindness service professionals would like to increase Black participation in the field. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 32. | Targeting recruitment efforts specifically toward Blacks will increase the numbers of Black professionals in blindness services. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 33. | Government policies have increased Black participation in the blindness profession. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

**How can hiring practices be changed to recruit and to hire more Blacks in blindness services?**

| | | Strongly disagree | | | | | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 34. | There are few Blacks in the blindness services profession because of discrimination in past hiring practices. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 35. | There has been little opportunity for Blacks to move into the blindness services profession because there has been almost no turnover or very few new jobs in this field. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 36. | There has been little opportunity for Blacks to move up within the blindness services profession because there has been almost no turnover or very few new jobs in this field. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 37. | Lack of opportunity for upward mobility (career advancement) discourages Blacks more than Whites in pursuing careers in blindness services. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 38. | Assuming that many blindness services professionals are approaching retirement, there will be more opportunity for Blacks to enter blindness services in the future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 39. | As new job opportunities occur in the blindness services profession, Blacks will get their fair share of new jobs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 40. | As new job opportunities occur in the blindness services profession, Blacks will have their fair share of opportunities to move up within the profession. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

**How can Blacks have real opportunities for new jobs in blindness services?**

| | Strongly disagree | | | | | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 41. Due to a history of economic hardship, Blacks are less likely than Whites to pursue lower paying jobs such as those in blindness services. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 42. Family and community ties prevent Blacks more than Whites from moving or relocating to take jobs in blindness services. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 43. Economic factors prevent Blacks more than Whites from moving or relocating to take jobs in blindness services. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

**What can be done to overcome possible difficulties associated with moving or relocation for Blacks in taking jobs in blindness services?**

**What other specific actions or activities could lead to increased participation by Blacks in blindness services careers?**

**Please answer the following questions.**

1.How old were you on your last birthday? ____

2. What is your sex? Male ☐ Female ☐

3. To what racial or ethnic group do you belong?
   - ☐ Black or African-American
   - ☐ White or Caucasian
   - ☐ Other (please specify) _____

4. What is your current marital status?
   - ☐ Married
   - ☐ Never Married
   - ☐ Divorced
   - ☐ Widowed
   - ☐ Legally Separated

5. Which job category best describes your job in rehabilitation?
   - ☐ State Office Administrator
   - ☐ Area/Regional Administrator
   - ☐ Other Administrator
   - ☐ Rehabilitation Counselor
   - ☐ Instructional Staff (for example O&M, Low Vision, Rehabilitation Teaching)
   - ☐ BEP Representative
   - ☐ State Office Secretary
   - ☐ Local Office Secretary

6. How long have your worked in the blindness system? ____

7. What is the highest level of education *you* have achieved?
   - ☐ Less than high school graduation
   - ☐ High school graduate, GED
   - ☐ Some college
   - ☐ Community or junior college graduate
   - ☐ Senior college or university graduate
   - ☐ Some postgraduate college work
   - ☐ Master's degree
   - ☐ Doctorate degree

8. What is the highest level of education achieved by ***either of your parents***?

- ☐ Less than high school graduation
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Community or junior college graduate
- ☐ Senior college or university graduate
- ☐ Some postgraduate college work
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctorate degree

9. If you have ever been married, what is the highest level of education achieved by ***your spouse***?

- ☐ Less than high school graduation
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Community or junior college graduate
- ☐ Senior college or university graduate
- ☐ Some postgraduate college work
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctorate degree

10. Which of the following professional organizations do you belong?

- ☐ AER (Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired)
- ☐ NRA (National Rehabilitation Association)
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

11. Which of the following certifications do you hold?

- ☐ CRC (Certified Rehabilitation Counselor)
- ☐ AER Certification
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

- **Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your answers will help provide information to understand barriers and increase opportunities for Blacks in the profession of services to persons who are blind.**

- **Please return the survey in the envelope provided.**

- **Please return the enclosed postage-paid card SEPARATELY from the survey. This will notify us that you have returned your survey, and we will not need to contact you further.**

**If you would like to receive a copy of the summary of the results from this survey, please contact:**

Ms. Suzanne Ewing
RRTC on Blindness and Low Vision
P.O. Drawer 6189
Mississippi State, MS 39762
Phone: (601) 325-3304

MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY
TEACHING
SERVICE
RESEARCH
1878